

# When A Boy Becomes A Man

by Aryea

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Drama, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2014-07-19 23:38:18

Updated: 2014-08-03 19:43:13

Packaged: 2016-04-26 20:02:30

Rating: T

Chapters: 22

Words: 68,277

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: Life after the end of How To Train Your Dragon 2. Hiccup had to deal with his loss and new career. SPOILER ALERT! If you have not seen the movie and do not want to know what happens, do not read this story.

## 1. Chapter 1

\_Well...I'm back. I can't seem to get Hiccup to leave me alone. After seeing HTTYD 2 for the second time, another storyline got stuck in my head about what Hiccup must have gone through after his father died and how he dealt with his mother's sudden reappearance in his life. There are probably people who have already done this spin, but this is mine, so I hope you like it.\_

\_Warning, it is not a fluff piece, there will be some very real hurt/comfort moments. In fact I cried a little even as I was writing it. \_ Please, please review. It means so much to hear from you! Thanks.\_

\_HTTYD characters not mine.\_

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>CHAPTER ONE<strong>\_

Valka stood behind her son as he opened the door to his father's house. She didn't speak or rush him forward, because she knew how horrible he must be feeling, to enter his home with the knowledge that his father would never again be there to greet him. She had gone through something similar after she had been taken by Storm Cloud. It was a painfully, numbing despair that occurred when you believed a loved one was lost forever.

Hiccup stared at his father's chair, felt a weight crushing down on him, squeezing his chest and making it difficult to breathe. There were dishes still on the table, from breakfast the morning before,

when his father had spoke of his being Chief. And he had run, run away like frightened child because he had been too afraid to listen, too afraid to accept what his father wanted him to be.

His heart ached for the hours he had lost being stupid and afraid. He could have spent more time with his father that day, more time talking and far more time listening. Now, now it was too late, and he only had himself to blame.

His eyes lifted to the weapons in the room; the standard Viking equipment, a bolo, a mace, a standard shield and his father's second axe. His first one had been lost when...when...

Hiccup turned his attention to his father's cloak hanging on the wall, and then settled on their shield portrait, the one his father had re-commissioned so that Hiccup looked like himself, and not a bulked up version. His own shield was upstairs, in his room, on his wall.

His lower lip quivered and he bit down hard on it; pushed back the pain, the sorrow. Taking a deep breath, he stepped over the threshold.

"Um...sorry about the mess." He moved to the table, picked up the dishes and put them in the bucket to take outside and clean later. "We...I..." His breath hitched and he started again. "Wasn't expecting company."

Valka's heart broke all over again for him, as she stepped inside. He was trying so hard to be brave. The house was different than the one she'd shared with Stoick, smaller, but she still recognized a few things in it, and most of all, her husband's scent. "It's fine, Hiccup."

He slowly wiped off the table with a damp cloth, and then knelt to start a fire. "The place will warm up pretty quick, once I get it started." He set the wood in place, then out of habit said. "Toothless, if you please?"

When no plasma blast came Hiccup glanced over his shoulder and saw that Toothless was still standing outside the door, his head hung and his eyes filled with sadness.

"Toothless." Hiccup rose and went to him. "Hey, bud, aren't you coming in?"

Toothless lifted his gaze to his rider, then bowed his head again, stepped back and settled just outside the door.

"What is it?" Hiccup asked stepping outside with him and crouching down. "What's wrong? Why won't you come inside?"

The remorse in the Night Fury's eyes was heartbreaking.

"Oh, Toothless. Toothless, no! No one blames you, it...it wasn't your fault."

"Hiccup?"

He turned to look at his mother.

"Let him be. Dragons must grieve too."

"But...he won't come in the house. He...he always comes in the house and..."

Oh, my poor boy. She stepped out, placed her hand on his trembling shoulder. She couldn't seem to help herself from touching him. "He will, when he's ready. You mustn't push him."

Hiccup hugged Toothless, hard. "It will be okay, buddy. We'll both be okay."

Toothless murmured with a mixture of love and sadness, then dropped his head on his paws and stared out at the village.

Hiccup stepped back inside, lit the fire the old fashioned way, and then turned back to his mother. "So...um...quick tour...I guess." He pointed to the stairs. "My room, not much to see there, just a desk...bed."

He turned to the room at the back of the house on the other side of the hearth, pulled back the blanket hanging across it and revealed a large bed, a small bedside table, and large trunk that held his father's clothes. "Um...d...dad's room." He let the blanket drop back into place over the opening. "You can sleep in there, we just changed the bedding this week so it should be...um...reasonably fresh."

"You...you want me to stay here?" Valka asked, surprised. "With you?"

"Where...where else would you stay?" He scowled. "You're my mother, this is our house."

Our house. Did that mean he had decided to accept her back into his life? Granted, when Stoick had seen she was alive he had asked her to be his again, but now...now things were different. Now Stoick was gone and Hiccup didn't know her. She had left him when he was just a baby, just a baby. How would he ever forgive her for that?

"I...I just...I mean I can stay with someone else, I'm sure or...or the stables or sleep with Cloud Jumper, which is what I am used to and..."

"Don't you want stay here?" he asked suddenly in a rush of nerves. This day had driven him to the edge of an emotional precipice so many times that he was now hanging on by only his fingernails. "I...I know I'm probably not what you were hoping for... in a son, but I...I can do better and...and...I'm trying to..."

She moved forward and stopped herself just before she hugged him. That step had to come from him, she wouldn't rush it. Instead, she put a hands on his shoulders again, alarmed to find them shaking. "No one could ask for a better son, Hiccup. Never doubt that, please. But I've been away so long and...you have every right to feel awkward or...or angry with me."

He stared at her for so long that she worried she had changed his mind and he would now ask her to leave. And she wouldn't blame him

for it; she had abandoned him after all.

"I meant what I said, Mom. I'm glad you're here."

Tears stung her eyes. "Thank you."

He nodded and moved away. He did feel awkward with her, but angry? No, he wasn't angry. How could he be? Yes, she had let them believe her to be dead for his entire life, had left her husband and son to mourn her loss, but he understood her reasons, because he had been in a similar place only five years ago. He could have easily followed in her footsteps and left Berk with Toothless. No one had understood him either; no one had wanted him there. But he chose to stay; it was a hard choice, but he had made it.

Instead, she left Berk behind and trained dragons, just like him. She did what she did to protect those dragons, just like he had done for Toothless. He respected that, admired that, but was still confused about what he was actually feeling for her. She was his mother. His mother. He had never even considered the possibility of seeing her again; of ever having a mother; and he honestly had no idea how to relate to her. What was the appropriate thing for him to feel, to do for the woman that gave birth to him and then abandoned him?

There was a distance between them, and he blamed himself for it, but after all, he hardly knew her. He would have depended on his father to help bridge that gap, he realized now that he had depended on his father for so very much. Now, with Stoick gone it would be much harder to understand who she was, or how he should be with her.

"I should sleep upstairs," she suggested. "You're Chief now and so you should sleep in your father's bed."

"No." He shook his head slowly. "I...no. I can't."

Again she was drawn to touch him, and she did so, caressing his hair with her fingers. "It's all right, son. Whatever you're comfortable with."

Hiccup realized that he liked when she touched him, no one had really done that before, not in that way. He couldn't remember his father ever touching him, other than a pat on the back or shoulder, well except after he had been in danger; in which case he got what was almost a hug.

Astrid kissed him, squeezed his hand or his arm, and braided his hair. Sometimes she'd put her hand or head on his chest, but that was different. That was... well, Astrid and it held a totally different meaning than when Valka touched him.

He didn't know if he was supposed to touch her back. Did she expect him to...what...Embrace her like he did Astrid? Shake her hand like with Snotlout or pat her shoulder as he did with Fishlegs to show support; the way his father showed support. He simply didn't know. What did a son do with his mother?

In the end, he let his hand stay at his sides and took another deep breath. "I'm sorry, Mom, but I'm really tired. I think I'll go to bed."

"Yes, sure. Of course." She stepped back. "You must be exhausted." Gods, she wanted to pull him into her arms, crush him to her breast and hold him for the rest of their lives, but she couldn't. Not now. Not yet. "Good night, Hiccup."

Hiccup glanced at the door, wishing that Toothless would change his mind, then he slowly climbed the stairs to his room. Once there, he removed his armor, stripped down to just his tunic and trousers and stared at the large empty pallet by the wall. He sighed.

Dropping down on his bed, he plucked the toy dragon from the headboard and stared at it. His father had said his mother had made this for him, but he had been afraid of it when he was young. Trader Johann had found it and brought it back to them years later. He'd spent many nights staring at it, hoping it would inspire some memory of his mother, but it never did. Even now, now that he had seen her living and breathing before him, he had no memory of her. She was a stranger.

He set the toy back in its nook on the headboard and rose to look out the window at the evening sky. Gods, he was tired, he didn't remember when he had ever been this tired. He couldn't even remember the last time he slept.

He leaned against the window frame, closed his eyes and instantly saw his father running towards him, heard himself scream and the bright flash of a plasma blast.

Gasping, his eyes shot open and his hand flew to his mouth to stop he bile that rose into his throat. After several slow, deep breaths he squeezed his eyes shut and fought through the bright light to bring another image to his mind, that of his father and mother dancing together. Gods, was that just yesterday? It seemed so long ago, seemed like days, weeks had past, and yet they hadn't.

His father hadn't yelled or screamed of Valka's betrayal, he had only seemed grateful to find his wife again. Hiccup had to hold on to that. He had to hold on to the fact that his father had immediately forgiven his wife for her abandonment, without hesitation, and he needed to do that too. He had to remember how deliriously happy his father had been in just those few short hours, happier than Hiccup had ever seen him, just before Bludvist had descended upon them.

He sat down on his bed again. "Dear Odin," he whispered. "Please watch over my father. Please tell him...tell him I'll try. I'll never stop...try..ing." A sob tore from his throat. "I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, Dad." He fell sideways, curled up on his side and wept.

Outside, a Night Fury stood guard at the door of his friend and master, his keen dragon ears caught the sounds of a sad and broken boy. Two great men once lived in this house. Now there was only one.

He lifted his head and stared at a grouping of stars far to the north, that when you looked closely, appeared to be the outline of a dragon. It was a place well known to him, a place where all worthy dragons went when they died. To become the essence of light and purity and share the sky with their kin was an honor that all dragons wished for.

He wondered if Humans had an everlasting place to go to, for if they did, he knew that Stoick's star would be outshining all the others. He released a low, mournful cry and throughout the village Vikings peered out their doors and windows. As other sounds followed, they carried high on the wind across the island of Berk, growing to a single sound of mourning. A Dragon's lament for a weeping boy and a lost Chief.

## 2. Chapter 2

Thanks to tirtlegrrl, zendayagomez (sorry about making you cry...well, not really. ;-), and Tasermon's Partner (Mind reader!) for the reviews. Please keep them coming. It seems Hiccup and his friends are intent on taking over my life, I have never written stories so fast! Anyway, hope you enjoy, there is a little sexual tension in this one but nothing overt.

Please read and review, review, review!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CHAPTER TWO<strong>

Hiccup was startled from his misery by the sound of tapping. "Toothless?" He sat up, looked at the empty pallet by the wall, then at the window. It was still dark outside. More tapping sounded and he realized it was the front door.

Wiping his hands over his face he rose and started down, just as Valka was opening the door.

Astrid stood there, idly petting Toothless. "Oh...uh...hi, Mrs. Haddock?" the greeting was more of a question than a solicitation.

"Hello, Astrid. Did you need Hiccup?"

"Oh, well, I..."

"What is it, Astrid?" Hiccup asked from about halfway down the stairs.

"Uh, hi!" She offered an uncomfortable wave. "Sorry for the late hour, but most everyone is settled in at the homes that are left, or the Great Hall. I've got a family of four staying at my place and...and..."

"Do you need a room for the night, Astrid?" Valka asked kindly, and stepped aside. "You're welcome to stay with us, of course."

Hiccup and Astrid both blushed furiously.

"Thanks. I...I'm sorry I didn't come sooner, I was actually at my house trying to sleep, but it was so loud with the...others and..."

"Not to worry, dear. Come on in."

Astrid stepped over the threshold. "Why is Toothless outside?" she asked as Valka closed the door. She had heard the dragon's crying earlier and wondered if Hiccup was still upset about what Toothless did to Stoick and that was why the dragon was not in the house.

Hiccup sighed, sadly. "He...he won't come in."

"He's grieving," Valka assured and moved toward the low burning fire. "Would you like something to eat, Astrid? Or drink?"

"No. No, thank you ah...Mrs..."

"Just call me Valka, Astrid, or Val."

Astrid smiled relieved. It just felt weird calling her Mrs. Haddock when Stoick had been a widower all these years. "Okay."

"Hiccup, why don't you take Astrid upstairs and find a place for her?" When her son looked at her as if she had two heads she wondered if she had overstepped her authority. After all, this was his house, not hers.

"Upstairs?" he croaked. She wanted Astrid to sleep upstairs, in his room? Why were the Gods tormenting him?

"Or...or she can stay down here. Or..."

"I'll be fine upstairs," Astrid assured, pushing away her own nerves.

Stoick's wife was obviously uncertain around her son, and really Astrid couldn't blame her. She was actually surprised that Hiccup was even letting his mother stay there, but that was her Hiccup, generous to a fault.

"Ah...yeah. Sure." Hiccup turned and started back up the stairs. "Upstairs then."

Astrid slowly followed. She'd been in Hiccup's room before of course, but not over night. She'd been with him on overnight trips as well, but that was for training and survival, not...well, not this. And they were engaged so it wasn't like anyone would make that big of a deal, except maybe Hiccup.

She hadn't thought of where she was going when she left the noise of her house, the snoring and strange grunting the other Vikings were making in their sleep, she just knew if she was going to get any sleep she had to go elsewhere. How she ended up at Hiccup's door she couldn't say, and now she was trying to talk herself into staying here.

Hiccup had pulled extra blankets out of a small trunk by his wall and was laying them on the floor under the window.

"Thanks," she said and plopped down on them, gratefully.

He stared at her for a moment. "Ah...no." He caught her arm, pulled her back to her feet and guided her to his bed, where he gently shoved her on to the mattress. "You sleep there."

"But, Hiccup!"

"It's fine, Astrid." Hiccup sat down on the makeshift bed of blankets, pulled one knee up to his chest and stared at her. "I probably won't sleep much anyway."

She could see he had been crying, but had chosen not mention it and risk embarrassing him. "Are you sure?"

He nodded and watched as she stripped off her armament, then sat down again to pull off her boots. She realized he was still sitting there, watching her.

"What?"

After a moment's hesitation, Hiccup crawled over between her legs, slid his arms around her waist and buried his face there. All feelings of shyness left her.

"Oh, babe." She caressed his hair. "It's been such a bad day for you, hasn't it?"

"Yeah."

"I can't imagine what you must be going through."

"Me either."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

He shook his head.

"Okay." She lovingly ran her fingers through his hair. "That's okay."

"I'm glad you're here, Astrid." he murmured, and realized that despite living and sleeping most of his life alone, with the exception of his father, he really hadn't wanted to be alone tonight. "I keep seeing it. Whenever I close my eyes, I see Toothless, and Dad and then...the blast." He buried closer against her, trying to push back the urge to cry again.

"Oh, Hiccup." She tugged at his arms, pulled him up on the bed with her so she could hug him properly. "Your father was such a great man," she whispered. "And despite what you think, you are absolutely his son. You will be just as great, if you'll give yourself time to get there."

"How? How can I? He was...he was everything, Astrid. Everything the people needed." Everything a son needed, he thought bitterly. A son that never listened, that was always afraid.

"Times have changed, babe. You have changed them and they can't go back to what they were before. The Chief..." She swallowed as she started to swell up herself. "Stoick was the Chief everyone needed before, and he was amazing at it and we will all miss him so very much, but now you're the Chief." She pulled back, cradled his miserable face in her hands. "Your mom was right when she said you have the soul of a Dragon, Hiccup. You're the only one that can be



what we all need." She kissed his forehead tenderly. "Because what we all need is you."

"Oh, Astrid." He wished he could believe her, wanted so much to believe he could take his father's place. "I...I don't know what I would do without you."

She smirked and gave him a gentle tap in the chest. "Don't try and figure it out either, or I will hunt you down!"

Instead of smiling, as she had intended, he leaned in and kissed her. She slid her arms around his neck and pulled him in deeper. He needed this, she thought. They both needed this.

Finally, they broke apart and Hiccup realized that they were both on his bed. He started to rise, but she pulled him back.

"Let me..." Astrid began then flushed as she struggled to find the right words. "Let me hold you, tonight, Hiccup? Let's...let's just hold each other?"

He stared at her, knew it wasn't appropriate and yet it was probably what he needed; what they both needed. "Okay," he agreed softly and pulled back the covers.

"Aren't you going to take your leg off?"

He shook his head. It had been a habit to sleep with it on, in case anything happened during the night, although he did remove it when his stump was aching, as it was tonight. Still, he had never had it off in front of Astrid. "It's fine."

"Hiccup." She stared up at him, took his hands. "We're going to be married, remember?"

Still he hesitated. "I...I don't want it to...gross you out, Astrid."

"Oh Hiccup. Gobber showed me both his stumps when I was only eight," she admitted and pulled him back down on the bed. "They don't bother me. Here, let me help."

"No!" He flushed again. "No, I'm...I can do it." Taking a deep breath he removed the intricate bindings, then set his leg by the wall. He glanced at her, and when she nodded encouragingly, he pulled off the small short binding sleeve and revealed his bare stump.

Astrid stared at the rounded flesh. There was no scarring, no blood anything detestable, it was just a stump and she had seen plenty of Vikings with them. Hiccup's was a little red and puffy, probably from wearing his prosthetic so long.

She reached forward and delicately ran her fingers over it, finding it smooth. "Is it sore?"

He shook his head, met her eyes and lowered his. "It's throbbing a little."

"Do you have any liniment or anything I can rub on it?"

"Yes, but I don't need it. I...I just need to rest it, that's all."

She nodded and they both rose to get under the covers and she snuggled into him. "Now, isn't this better?"

She tried not to think of how compromising their position might look to someone else, and reasoned that they were old enough to do as they wanted. Besides, Hiccup was a Chief at only twenty and she was a full year older than he. She doubted anyone would actually give them grief over sharing a bed before their wedding night. It wasn't like they were going to have sex, right?

The moment the idea entered her mind she immediately thought about them having sex. Odin's Beard! Why had she done that? Now she'd never get to sleep! She realized how warm Hiccup's body was against hers, how nice he smelled, of pine and clean cool air. She wondered, just a thought really, if he wanted to kiss her again.

"Hiccup?" She rose up on her elbow, found him watching her and realized he was thinking the exact same things as he.  
"H...Hi."

"Hi."

"Can't sleep?"

He slowly shook his head, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Um...would you like me to...do more than just...just hold you?"

She could see the internal struggle in his eyes. He did want more, but he would never ask for it. Instead he said, softly. "I love you."

She melted. "I love you." She leaned down and pressed her lips to his. "Always and forever."

His hand slid up, cupped her neck and brought her down for another kiss, just as there was a tapping at the door again. His hand dropped and he rolled his eyes. "Really?"

Astrid giggled at the frustrated look on his face and rolled from the bed. "I'll get it." She hurried downstairs, this time before Valka could get to the door. Gobber stood there with his helmet in his hands. "Gobber!"

"Oh, eh...hi, Astrid." He scratched his neck. "I didn't expect you to be here."

"My house was full so Hiccup said I could stay here."

"Ah, yes...mine...mine too. I was gonna sleep at the forge, but it's encased in ice, still."

"Come on in, Gobber," Hiccup said as he descended the stairs, having refastened his metal leg. "You're welcome to stay too."

"Ah, thank, ye, Hiccup." He scratched his neck. "There's just one thing. I'm not alone." He stepped back and the other riders peered at

him, hopefully. "A lot of people are in the hall but the entrance to the catacombs is blocked. Looks like everyone who had a house still standing gave them up for others, then kinda forgot about having a place themselves."

Hiccup stared at his friends. These were his friends, his team and they had done the job needed of getting everyone else secured for the night, without thought to themselves. Even Snotlout, which surprised him. He suddenly felt a little less alone with his new mantle of Chief.

He waved them forward. "We'll make room," he decided as Valka stepped out with extra blankets. The pushed the table and other furniture to the far edge of the room as Gobber stoked the fire.

"Uh, Gobber, you, Fishlegs and Snotlout can sleep down here. The twins upstairs with us."

"Awesome!" Fishlegs said. "Thanks, Hiccup!"

"Hey, can we, like, tell ghost stories?" Tuffnut asked.

"Your ghost stories are lame," Snotlout said as he made himself a bed on the floor.

"Gobber's aren't!" Ruffnut said.

"No ghost stories," Hiccup insisted and was surprised that he felt the urge to laugh. He'd almost forgotten that feeling. "It's late and we have a lot to do tomorrow."

"Sure thing, Chief." Tuffnut said and scurried upstairs with a blanket. "I call the left window."

"I want by the window!" Ruffnut chased after him.

Astrid grinned at Hiccup who had been startled by Tuffnut's easy address. She put her hand on his shoulder. "So, shall we go to bed, Chief?"

He flushed and nodded. "Mom, do you need anything?"

Valka was making up a bed for Gobber and shook her head. "Oh no, you two go on up. You need to sleep."

"I like folded corners," they heard Gobber say as they headed up.

"You'll take it flat and like it," Valka countered.

"Yes, ma'am."

Astrid grinned again at Hiccup as they stepped up into his room. Neither Ruffnut or Tuffnut were by the window, instead they were both hanging from the ceiling beams by their legs, over Toothless' bed.

Tuffnut opened one eye, saluted. "Night, folks." He closed his eye again.

"That's really creepy how they do that," Astrid stated as she crawled back into Hiccup's bed.

"To each their own," he said as he settled on the blankets by the window, only to be pinched by Astrid. "Ow!"

"Get back here, you!"

"Astrid!" He pointed at the twins dangling just a few feet from them.

"Oh, don't mind us." Ruffnut reached up and adjusted her position so she was hanging with her face to the wall and her back to them. She poked her brother, who quickly did the same.

Astrid laughed and patted the bed. "Come on."

Hiccup shook his head, removed his leg again and slid in beside her. Within moments he was asleep.

### 3. Chapter 3

\_Thanks to Tasermon's Partner, Drj17, Hapciuovici, jackp257 and Seryyth for reviews. It only takes a moment to review folks, so please drop me a line if you are enjoying it, each word is like liquid gold to this dusty old scribe. :-)\_

\_This story is bound to be heavier than my last one, but I will try and balance it with some light and humor when I can. Thanks everyone for reading! HTTYD characters not mine.\_

\* \* \*

### ><p><strong>CHAPTER THREE<strong>

The following morning Hiccup awoke on his side with Astrid spooned against him. He was struck by the comfort she offered, and then noticed the incredible silence surrounding them. No Toothless jumping on the roof, or huffing in his ear to wake him for a morning ride. No sounds of his father shuffling around downstairs, occasionally dropping something as he was getting dressed. Not even cries of other dragons outside. It was just so, utterly and miserably silent.

With a sad sigh, he carefully pushed back the covers, sat up and reached for his leg. We looked down at Astrid, who continued to sleep and marveled at how peaceful she looked. He smirked, thinking she would probably hit him for such a comment; peaceful and Astrid were not usually used in the same sentence.

He gently pulled a wisp of blond hair away from her eyes, tilted his head and wondered how he had ended up with the most beautiful girl on Berk. "You just love me for my dragon," he murmured.

"And your ass," she murmured back, watching him flush as she opened one eye and reached for his hand to keep him from rising. "Kinda fond of that face and body too."

He rolled his eyes, ran his hand over his chest. "Ah, yes, who can resist all this raw Vikingness?"

Knowing he was being sarcastic, she propped herself up on her elbow. "Not me." She caught his shirt pulled him down for a quick kiss. "See? Putty in your hands, sir."

"Astrid." Hiccup glanced uneasily at the twins, who still dangled from his ceiling; he couldn't be sure they were still asleep.

"They're still out." She waved her hand at them. "Besides, if they say anything I'll carve 'em up into tiny pieces."

He smirked as he recalled his earlier thoughts of her being \_peaceful\_.

"And, we are engaged, Hiccup."

"I know," he smirked and tugged at her braid. "You remind me daily."

"I'm just keeping you informed." She grinned as he rose, pulled on his boot then started to slide into his armor. "You have so much on your mind, I don't want you to forget."

"Forget I was marrying you?" As he strapped on his flying gear he shook his head. "That would be like forgetting to breathe, Milady."

Astrid felt herself slide back onto the pillow in a girly swoon. Sometimes that man said things that melted the breath right out of her body.

Hiccup suddenly sniffed the air. "Do...do you smell something burning?"

Astrid worried it might be her, what with the whole melting process and all, but then she sat up again. "Yeah. What \_is\_ that?"

Was the house on fire? "Oh Gods!"

Hiccup hurried downstairs, with Astrid close behind, then suddenly stopped at the sight of the woman standing by the open door, scraping food from a pan outside. It took him a moment to remember who she was. His mother. He had a mother, and she was alive and well and now living in their house.

"What happened?" he asked as he approached her. It was so...odd to see her there instead of his father. It was something he would have to adjust to, he supposed. "We smelled something burning."

"Sorry, sorry, that was me!" She dumped the rest of the eggs she had blackened and stepped back inside. "I was going to make you breakfast but, well...I haven't cooked for anyone but myself in so long I..."

"I offered to help," Gobber pointed out, from his seat at the table. "But she wouldn't let me."

She looked at Hiccup helplessly. "I...I just wanted to..." Be a mother she almost said. She wanted to cook her son breakfast, for the

first time in twenty years, and she couldn't even do that right. Her shoulders slumped. "Perhaps I have been gone too long. Spent...too much time with dragons."

"Oh, I dinna think that has a thing to do with it," Gobber assured, and then bowed his head chagrined when Hiccup glared at him.

He stepped over Snotlout and Fishlegs, who were both snoring quietly on the floor, and gently took the pan and spoon from Valka's agitated fingers. "There's no need for that."

He glanced out at the mess of eggs on the ground, which even Toothless turned his nose up at. Wow, Gobber wasn't kidding about her cooking ability.

"I can make us something." He had been doing most of the cooking for him and his father anyway.

"Why don't we all just go to the hall for breakfast?" Astrid suggested, as Snotlout woke and rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Yeah," he yawned. "We all slept together, may as well eat together." He paused at their surprised look. "Wait, that sounded better in my head."

"That would probably be safer," Valka told Hiccup ruefully, glancing down at the pan in his hands.

"Okay." He set the pan on the table and turned to Astrid. "Go ahead and wake everyone, I'll meet you there."

"Where...where are you going?" Valka asked, surprised.

"I have to feed Toothless and take him for a quick ride."

"Oh. Well, do you mind if I go with you? I'm sure the way you feed your dragons are different than what I'm used to."

Hiccup recalled the amazing spray of fish that had been provided by the Alpha dragon for his flock, and the incredible sight of hundreds of dragons soaring through the air to catch their flying meal. Yes, they definitely did things differently on Berk.

"I...sure." He stepped outside. "Morning, bud." Toothless rose as Hiccup approached. "Did you sleep okay?"

Toothless rumbled in ascension, pressed his head against Hiccup's and accepted the gentle caress of his friend, then pulled back.

Yeah, Toothless could feel it too, Hiccup thought, bitterly. There was a barrier between them now, a barrier they both had to work at tearing down.

"It will be okay," he murmured. "I promise, we'll be okay."

Toothless sighed and turned sad eyes on Valka.

"Good morning, sweetheart," she offered, stepping in to give him a

kiss and a rub. "What a brave dragon you were yesterday, hmmm? Just like your rider."

Toothless seemed pleased by the comparison, but did not playfully flop around her as he had yesterday afternoon.

Hiccup could see that the Night Fury was still upset and that angered him, but that anger was directed at Drago, and more importantly, himself, not at Toothless. If only he had listened to his father and not tried to talk peace to a madman, his father would still be alive. But then, if he hadn't he would never have found his mother.

He looked at Valka, and was beginning to wonder if the trade off was worth it

"Do you want to take a ride, Toothless?" Hiccup asked and his heart dropped as the dragon listlessly turned so that Hiccup could climb onto his back. Toothless didn't want a morning flight but would go if asked, and that hurt.

Valka watched her son struggle to hold it together, saw the sorrow on both human and dragon and her heart wept for them.

"He's tired," Hiccup told her, unwilling to accept any other reason. "We usually go for a ride in the morning, but he...he's tired." He walked over to the food shed and pulled out a basket of fish. He brought it over and set it next to the dragon. "There you go, Toothless. Breakfast is served."

Toothless looked at the basket, then back at Hiccup, without making a move to take a fish.

"Please eat, bud." Hiccup leaned against the Night Fury's neck. "You have to eat." He took a fish from the basket and held it out to the dragon, but Toothless simply stared at him.

"He'll eat when he's hungry, Hiccup," Valka offered kindly.

"But he's always hungry!" Hiccup brushed the fish over Toothless' lips. "Come on. Don't do this to me, Toothless. Eat!"

The dragon's ears flattened and he pulled back from Hiccup, startled.

"No. No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry." Hiccup dropped the fish and hugged the dragon. "This is all my fault. I'm so sorry."

Toothless closed his eyes and bowed his head into his rider's embrace.

"It will get better," Valka promised, putting one hand on the dragon and the other on her son. "You need to give yourselves time to grieve..."

Hiccup shrugged her off, turned and wiped the tears away from his face, he hoped before she could see them. "There is no time," he snapped. "I'm Chief now, there's no time to..." His breath hitched and he pulled it back. No. No he wasn't going to do that again. His father would want him to be strong, to take care of his people. "There's no time."

He moved back to the shed and pulled out another basket of fish as the other riders and Gobber stepped out of his house. "Gobber, can you bring this to Cloud Jumper," he asked, and then turned away before he received a reply. "I'll meet you in the hall."

Astrid stepped up to Valka, watched her boyfriend walk dejectedly away from them. "What happened?"

"Life," Valka sighed. "Life always happens." She turned to Gobber. "I'll call Cloud Jumper. She'll be hungry."

Hiccup didn't know where he was going, he just needed to walk. It was odd, he was so used to flying everywhere, but he supposed the exercise would do him good. When he arrived at the cove, he sighed. Of course he'd come here, here where it all began.

He dropped down on one of the larger rocks and hung his head. He had to figure a way through this, figure a way around it. He needed a plan; that was what he was good at, plans and strategy. But he couldn't think straight. Every time he tried to devise some sort of system for dealing with...everything, his father's voice came into his head, warning him to stay away from Drago Bludvist.

Oh yeah, because he always had such great plans, didn't he? Surrender to the dragon traders so they would lead him to Bludvist. Don't listen to anything but your own damn self. Put your girlfriend in danger. Risk people capturing and killing your best friend. Find your mother and lose your father. That worked out so incredibly well, didn't it?

He'd been terrified of Toothless yesterday. For the first time since he had shot the dragon down five years ago, he had been absolutely terrified. Flying up to the Night Fury on the back of that baby dragon had probably been the single most terrifying thing he had ever done, but he'd had to do it.

Toothless was his best friend, and he hated that he still harbored anger and resentment over the fact that his best friend had killed his father. Not by choice, he knew that Toothless hadn't had any control over it, but that didn't take away the fear or the bitterness.

He'd had to risk it, risk being blasted by a dragon that he was no longer sure was still his friend and was instead under the control of a madman. But, he couldn't lose them both, and so he'd had to try.

He'd get over the resentment; he knew that, just as he had gotten over it when Toothless had bitten his leg off to save him. He...They just needed time together to cement their bond again, time alone. But now Toothless wouldn't step into his house and he wouldn't eat. And it was all his fault!

The scream of frustration and grief tore from him before he could even think to tame it.

"Uh...Hiccup?"

What?" Hiccup rose and spun around, furious that he couldn't even



have a moment to himself, one stinking moment to scream and rage and cry. "What now?"

Snotlout stared at him in obvious discomfort. "I'm sorry, man."

"Why?" Hiccup sighed, surprised at how unsteady his voice sounded, and ran his hand over his face. Gods help him. He didn't have the strength for this kind of nonsense. "What did you do now?"

Snotlout took a hesitant step closer, then tentatively gripped Hiccup's upper arm. "I'm sorry."

Hiccup stared into Snotlout's face and was shocked to see his own sorrow reflected back.

"About the Chief, about Toothless...I know it's been hard and you...You don't deserve any of this. No one, no one deserves..." Snotlout waved his free hand helplessly. "This."

"I..." Hiccup was speechless.

"Look, I know I've been a yak's butt on more than one occasion, and I've harassed you and undermined you at every turn, but...I want you to know, that ends now."

Hiccup tried to swallow the lump in his throat. "Why?"

"Because it has to," Snotlout stated firmly. "Because we're both men now, whether we like it or not, and you are the new Chief." He gripped Hiccup's other arm. "My Chief, and I know you'll do what's best for us."

"T...thanks, Snotlout." What else could he say? Honestly, Hiccup didn't know what else he could possibly say.

"Yeah." Snotlout nodded and dropped his hands to his sides, as if suddenly realizing he was actually, physically touching Hiccup. "And listen, I saw that Toothless isn't eating, but dude, Hook Fang was that way for awhile after we got him to flame again. I think eating after something like that probably messes with their digestion or something. Maybe it's the same with Toothless. I mean that whole blasting the ice off of you and then at the Alpha. Well, that was a hell of a lot more than six shots, right?"

Hiccup nodded, he hadn't considered that. Toothless had been off his food for a few days after he ate that eel that time. Maybe he was being too sensitive.

"I...I appreciate the advice." He slid his hand forward, awkwardly, and Snotlout shook it. "I'm probably gonna make a lot of mistakes. I hope I can...count on you to set me straight."

Snotlout grinned and seemed himself again. "Oh yeah, I'll be all over that." He offered a mocking bow. "Discretely, of course, Sir."

"Do you even know how to be discrete?"

"I'll take lessons, shouldn't be that hard. I am after all..." Snotlout kissed his bicep. "A Jorgenson."

Hiccup smiled and felt a crack of relief. "Yeah, well, you'll always have...yourself."

#### 4. Chapter 4

\_HTTYD character do not belong to me I am only borrowing them. I thank everyone for their reviews and suggestions. I've re-written this scene about four times and I'm still not completely happy with it, but hopefully you'll enjoy it anyway.\_

\* \* \*

#### ><p><strong>CHAPTER FOUR<strong>

Hiccup and Snotlout walked back to the cove in silence, and then they parted as Snotlout headed to his house, and promised to be at the hall shortly.

Hiccup saw his mother and Toothless sitting on the steps leading up to the Great Hall, waiting for him.

Toothless rose and wound around Hiccup, worried.

"I'm okay, bud. Sorry for walking off like that." He looked at his mother, and offered her a small smile. "So...breakfast?"

She nodded and they climbed the stairs together, with Toothless walking between them.

They entered, found many of the tables already taken, except the one where the riders usually sat. Hiccup spotted Astrid there and she waved at them.

Valka hung back. "Oh."

"What's wrong?"

"There's just...so many people in here."

"Not as many as there were outside when we were fighting Drago," he reminded kindly.

"No. No, I suppose not." She chewed her lower lip, apprehensively. "I...I wasn't well liked, Hiccup. Before, I mean. I...maybe I should eat with Cloud Jumper?"

"That was years ago. You are my father's wife, and of course they will accept you." He took her hand. "Things are different now. It's okay to be different, here." Saying the words aloud helped him to start believing them, finally.

Her heart melted as she looked first at their joined hands, then into his eyes. "Sorry, you...I'll have to get used to people again, that's all."

"You'll be fine."

They walked over to the table and he released her hand to settle

beside Astrid. "Morning, Milady."

"Good morning, yourself." She leaned in and whispered. "Have a good night?"

He did his best not to blush as he thought of their earlier positions and, as per was his way, hid behind sarcasm. "Well, the service was decent, but the inn was a little crowded."

She laughed.

"Hey, Hiccup," Tuffnut greeted, as the twins settled opposite with their plates. "Man your rafters are awesome, way more comfortable than ours. Can we sleep at your house every night?"

Hiccup didn't even hesitate. "No."

"Well, good morning, Hiccup." Mulch stopped by the table and spoke to Hiccup. "You don't usually eat breakfast in the hall."

Astrid could have kicked the older man. Hiccup didn't need to be reminded that Stoick and he always ate at home.

"That's my fault, I'm afraid," Valka offered. "I'm not really much of a cook."

"I can testify to that." Gobber announced and set two steaming plates of eggs and fried fish on the table in front of them as he pointed to his metal tooth. "That's where I lost this baby."

"Oh stop!" She told him. "You lost that when you and Stoick decided to ring in the Harvest by instigating a brawl in the streets!"

Gobber settled opposite her with his own plate and grinned. "Ah yes, what a fight that was."

"You and my dad started a fight in the street?" Hiccup asked, surprised. "Wasn't that, kind of opposite of what a Chief should do?"

"Oh, he wasn't Chief yet, so he was still allowed to get into trouble occasionally."

"And you helped him get into trouble as often as humanly possible," Valka retorted.

"Well, what are mates for, after all?"

"How old were you?" Astrid inquired.

"Oh, about your age, I suspect."

Hiccup glanced around at his friends. "Where's Fishlegs?"

"Probably feeding Meatlug," Astrid said. "Stormfly was starving when I got there this morning."

Hiccup thought of Toothless not eating and pushed his food around his plate, trying to eat but having almost no appetite. Maybe Snotlout

had been right, maybe bad circumstances did cause a lull in appetite for dragons, it certainly was creating one in him.

He noticed a strange silence in the hall and when he looked up a lot of people from the other tables were staring at him.

"What's going on?" he asked Gobber. "Why is everyone staring at me?"

"Oh, don't mind them, they're just confused by where you're sitting, that's all."

"This is where I always sit."

"Oh sure." Gobber nodded patiently, and pointed to the head table that was the only table set up horizontally instead of vertically. "But the Chief always sits up there."

Hiccup looked at the head table, then back down at his food. Really? He remembered his father sat there for special dinners or meetings, but...Great Odin's Ghost, did he really have to do that too? Sit up there, by himself?

Well, he was the Chief now, he supposed he would have to get use to being...separate. He'd been separate before, sat alone most of his life in fact, so he supposed he would just have to get used to it again. It didn't matter that he wasn't ready to do this; he was now, for better or worse, the Chief of Berk. He wasn't the Chief the people wanted or required, but he had promised to try.

Ignoring the lead weight in his stomach, he picked up his plate and slowly walked to the head table in the front of the hall. He stared at the chief's chair, wide seat with a high back. Massive, like his father had been. He'd look like a twig against a mountainside.

He bit his lip, then set his plate down and reluctantly pulled the chair out. Sitting down felt like losing his father all over again and he had to remind himself to breathe. In an attempt to hide his anxiety and grief, he leaned his head on his fist, picked up his fork and stared at his food as he pretended to eat; vowing to eat breakfast at home from now on; even if he did have to cook it.

Toothless settled beside him, nudged him in support and he allowed the dragon a small smile of appreciation. He looked, up a minute later, at the sound of several chairs scraping against the wood floor.

Astrid, Valka, Gobber and the twins all settled at the table with him with their food, and then, so did Bucket and Mulch.

"Now, where were we?" Gobber asked as the conversation in the hall resumed. "Ah yes, I believe we were discussing how bad Valka's cooking is."

"Gobber!" Valka threw a piece of her fish at him.

"Hey, it's warmer up here," Ruffnut stated. "How come it's warmer up here?"

"Maybe it's all the hot air?" Astrid suggested pointedly.

Hiccup stared at them, stunned. He looked at Toothless, who seemed to say, see? Not so separate.

It was actually a good thing that he wasn't hungry, because after the fourth person came up to the table to ask him about something, he realized that he wouldn't have had the chance to eat anyway. There was still a lot to do and he had to start making some decisions. He rose and addressed the hall, including the people that were cued to speak with him.

"Ah, listen, everybody. C...Can I have your attention for..." He was shocked when the hall immediately quieted and everyone turned to him.

He wasn't used to that kind of response. People usually brushed him off or he had to harass them into listening to what he was trying to say. He felt Astrid's hand squeeze his reassuringly under the table edge, where no one could see.

"Um...right. So...I...I know you all have things you need done and I promise we will get to them." He paused and searched for what to say next. His father had made this look so easy. "Right now we have to...um... concentrate on repairing the damage made by Drago and his dragons."

His mind raced to form a plan until he spotted the last two other riders entering the hall.

"Fishlegs, Snotlout. I want you guys to concentrate on clearing the ice from the Alpha, especially around the watch tower and horn."

"You mean that white, one-horned wimp that ran away from a real Alpha?" Snotlout retorted and pointed at Toothless.

Several people chuckled and cheered as the Night Fury lifted his head a little higher and smacked his lips at them.

"Yeah, that guy," Hiccup grinned and rubbed Toothless' head, affectionately.

"Sure thing, Hic...!" Fishlegs began then flushed and amended. "Uh...Chief."

"You don't have to call me that, Fishlegs," Hiccup stated. "I'm still just Hiccup." He lifted his hands to include everyone. "I've inherited my father's place, but I am not the Chief he was, not yet. So...ah... if everyone is more comfortable calling me Hiccup that's...that's just fine, after all, it's my name."

A few more people chuckled and nodded in approval.

"Astrid." He glanced down at her. "Could you...be my number one?" he asked, almost shyly and she beamed at him.

"Really?" It was such an honor she almost flew out of her seat. "Absolutely!"

"Hang on! She's a woman, and your betrothed!" one of the Vikings declared. "She can't be your number one!"

"She's a Shield Maiden and a Dragon Rider, and she bloody well can!" Gobber snapped, putting an end to the discussion rather quickly by adding. "And anyone who doubts her ability can meet her in the arena at sundown. I'm happy to pick up any pieces that are left of ye."

There were no further objections.

Hiccup grinned at Gobber, then turned to Astrid, whose cheeks were slightly pink from hearing such public praise. "I need you to go around and find out from everyone where the worst damage is and then coordinate repairs."

She nodded. "You've got it."

"Mom, once we get things a little more in hand here, you and the twins need to scout a new location for the extra dragons. As much as I'd love for them to stay, there just isn't enough room on Berk for all of them."

The twins slapped each other's palms. "Road trip!"

"I already have an idea, Hiccup," Valka admitted, so proud of her son she was close to bursting.

To chose a female to be the Chief's Right Hand, why it was unheard of. Stoick and her son had been telling the truth, things in Berk had definitely changed.

"It's several days flying, but I think it would be the perfect place for them." It wouldn't be their former haven, where her Alpha had kept them all safe, but she was sure they could make do.

"That's great. Until then, maybe you can help me and Toothless organize the dragons to help with the heavy lifting?"

She nodded. "I'd love to."

"Gobber, can you see about rounding up those armoured dragons that Drago brought with him?"

"Right O, \_Chief\_." He winked.

Hiccup released a quick, slightly panicked breath. It was different hearing it from his friends somehow than from Gobber, a man who was like a second father to him. And the way the blacksmith had spoken up for Astrid. Well...he just couldn't get over all the support.

"I can help you with them this afternoon, Gobber, after Hiccup and I are done," Valka suggested. "Some of those dragons are bound to be skittish after what they've been through."

"Oh sure, I'll need time to clear space for their gear anyway." He smacked his lips, blissfully. "Mmmm...scrap metal."

"Right. Good." Hiccup clapped his hands together. That went pretty well, anyway. He looked out at the people watching him. "So, that's a

good start for the morning." He lifted his hands. "Let's get to work."

## 5. Chapter 5

\_HTTYD characters not mine. Sorry that his is such a long one folks, I just couldn't stop writing it I didn't want to chop it into two smaller ones and break the flow.

><em>

\_ Thanks everyone for the reviews, especially \_\_Tasermon's Partner! Your wonderfully in-depth reviews are what is keeping this story going my dear, so please feel free to take most of the credit for anyone who is enjoying it.\_

\_ If this has become a fav of anyone else, please feel free to review or PM me, so I know I am doing a satisfactory job (we writers are a needy bunch and hearing from readers is what makes all our hard work worthwhile \_\_ ) \_

\* \* \*

### ><p><strong>CHAPTER FIVE<strong>

The day past quickly, too quickly and they had barely made a dent in getting the village back to normal. Toothless had the dragons organized in minutes for the tasks that were required and Hiccup had been amazed at how quickly the other dragons responded to Berk's new Alpha; and Toothless did it by earning their respect and not using some hideous form of mind control.

The green ice sprayed by the White Alpha wasn't just ordinary ice, it was incredibly cold and hard and it couldn't be melted by normal dragon fire. In fact, the only dragon that had any effect on the ice was Toothless, who could use his plasma blasts to blow off large chunks at a time.

It was time consuming, and it used up most of the Night Fury's shots, which were now up to fifteen instead of six. Hiccup didn't understand what had caused the change, but suspected it may have had to do with when the Night Fury used his entire body to blast the ice away from them both, the day before. Toothless seemed fine with expending the extra energy, so Hiccup didn't question it further. As the ice was blasted apart, villagers used carts and other dragons to haul the ice away.

He, Toothless and several of the larger dragons were helping clear some of the heavier debris from the main village. It was back breaking work, even with the dragons doing most of the heavy lifting, simply because of the constant repetition.

At one point, as they were directing a Speckled Dart Dragon to pick up a huge beam, Hiccup spotted Fishlegs and the other riders flying over them with a massive piece of limestone.

"What in Thor are you planning to do with that?" he called out.

Fishlegs waved but didn't stop. "You'll see!"

Hiccup didn't consider the fact that as Chief, he could have demanded an answer, he simply waved them off and turned his attention back to his work. Sometimes, it was better not to know when Fishlegs was involved.

"Good job, bud." He rubbed Toothless' neck and noticed the sun was starting to set. It would soon be too dark to work. "Okay, Toothless, you can let them know we're done for the day."

Toothless sent out a series of roars, which was returned by the other dragons and soon the sky grew almost black as the reptiles took to the air to find a quiet spot to relax.

Hiccup caught sight of Snotlout flying towards him on Hookfang "Hey, tell everyone that's it for the day."

"Sure thing, Chief."

Hiccup watched his friend fly off without complaint or rebuttal and shook his head. "That's gonna take getting use to."

He and Toothless took another quick fly around the island and he was pleased to see how much they had managed to accomplish. Although, there were still a lot left to do, it was a fine start.

"Well, Dad," he sighed as he looked down on the place of his birth. "It looks good so far."

Of course, the people of Berk were used to hard work, but it had always been Stoick that united them in a common goal and directed how things needed to be done. They had all depended on his father so much, which was what worried Hiccup the most. He wasn't sure he could handle that much dependence on him.

But, the villagers had listened when he spoke and they had put their all into doing whatever was directed by their new Chief. He had been immensely grateful for Gobber, Bucket and Mulch, who had discreetly suggested a good way to do something, or indirectly referred to a matter Hiccup hadn't thought of, that needed to be tended to.

Hiccup was grateful for their assistance, but felt ashamed that he couldn't remember, or didn't know everything to do. He wished he had paid more attention when he had accompanied his father during the Chief's daily duties, because he knew that his father would expect him to be so much better at this than he was. He wasn't ready to be chief, and it was his own fault.

"I miss you Dad," he sighed. "You made this all look so...easy."

He took one more tour of the island, made a mental note of where they would need to start tomorrow and by the time he was done, the sun was down and a full moon had risen.

He needed to get to the hall. People would be there waiting for him to start directing chores for tomorrow, some people were assign for bigger homes or extra rooms or whatever during the rebuilding. There would be others asking him personal questions and requesting Thor knows what sort of ceremony that only a Chief could perform. He needed to make a decision on the winter provisions and what to do



with the ice they had collected so far.

He still hadn't had two minutes to actually sit down and talk to his mother. Did she want to live with him, or would she prefer a house of her own? And if she wanted to live with him, should they add on to their house while they were already rebuilding? It was fine for him and his father, but wouldn't she want a bigger place?

And the dragons, there were so many dragons now! Which ones should be allowed to stay and which ones should he decide to go? How could he choose? How was it fair for him to choose?

What if someone invaded them again? Would he have the courage to fend them off? What happened when the other tribes learned his father was dead? Would he then have to revisit all of them and arrange new treaties or start more wars? What was he going to do about...?

"I can't," he croaked suddenly and instead of landing, pulled Toothless higher. "I can't...breathe." He could feel the pressure building in his chest, his heart threatened to explode from its interior cavity and he was shaking. Dear Gods, he was having a panic attack!

Toothless sensed his rider's distress and shot up into the sky as fast as he could, away from the village of Berk and into the place they were both happiest.

They flew fast and fierce, forcing Hiccup to concentrate on their flying and forgetting everything else. He could feel the panic, the doubt melt away as they tested each other's reflexes with breakneck turns, fast dips and steep climbs.

He needed this; they both needed this. There was no way to describe the exhilaration and freedom of flying on a dragon, especially when that dragon moved as an extension of yourself. To feel the wind on their faces, enjoying the thrill of racing a pod of whales in the water below, or zooming through clouds so sheer and beautiful, that the Goddess Sif must have knit them from her own golden hair.

Hiccup lay back on Toothless and lifted his hands to scrape through those clouds, wishing he capture their essence to bring back to Astrid. He didn't want to go back, he realized. He didn't want to return to Berk and all the pressures that waited for him there, and he felt shame crawl through him again.

He put his hands over his face as Toothless idly glided along. "Gods! What is wrong with me?" How could he even think about shirking his responsibilities, especially now that his father was gone.

Sighing he sat up, and realized that he had to go back, but first, first he had to deal with this thing between him and Toothless. He needed to reinforce their trust, because he knew it wasn't the way it was before. They were working well together, but he could sense a withdrawal in his dragon, though not with anything he was asked to do, Toothless still obeyed his every command and the other dragons obeyed Toothless.

Toothless still wasn't eating and he wouldn't go into their house. That showed wariness on the Night Fury's part, a nervousness that they were both feeling, deep down. Whatever was going on between them

needed to be repaired, and since he didn't know when they would get another chance, now would have to be it.

Toothless murmured uneasily as he realized what his rider was planning. He would protect him at any cost, but he could sense Hiccup's growing anxiety. Hiccup had flinched every time he had released a plasma blast today, and he had never done that before. Hiccup was afraid of his fire and that made him nervous to use it.

"You are my best friend, Toothless," Hiccup encouraged as they climbed higher and higher into the night sky. "We've got to get over this."

Toothless moaned, sensing his rider's sudden change in attitude.

"It wasn't your fault, Toothless." Hiccup pushed the Night Fury higher and closed his eyes; saw the blue fire forming in his dragon's mouth, and then the blast. "I was angry before and...afraid." But he wasn't angry anymore, and he was going to conquer his fear.

Another mournful sound was released. Toothless had loved the Viking with the dragon sized voice and the giant hands that could rub all his right spots at the same time. The Viking who would sneak him something creamy and yummy called cheese, when his rider wasn't looking. He respected the man who could barely converse with his son while awake, but would come upstairs every night while his rider was sleeping, just to check on the boy and give him a kiss. He loved Big Beard, because Big Beard had loved Hiccup. He hadn't meant to hurt him!

"You couldn't save him. but you saved me and you saved his people. Nothing would have made him prouder."

Hiccup hated that his hands were shaking, even as he locked the tail and slipped his feet up onto the saddle. He had to show Toothless that he still trusted him, that he wasn't afraid anymore and would never be again. And Toothless needed to understand that whatever happened, they would stay together.

"I need you to forgive me, Toothless, and you need to let me forgive you."

Toothless shook his head emphatically as he realized what his rider was about to do.

"I trust you, Bud." Hiccup jumped. "Let's do this!"

Toothless dove after him, watched as his rider pulled the rip cords of his flight suit to activate his wings.

"Plasma Blast!"

Toothless shook his head and growled in alarm, because he was also afraid. He remembered how it had felt to see Big Beard immobile on the ground. How frightened and angry his rider had been with him, because of something he did, something he couldn't remember! And he remembered seeing fear in his rider's eyes, for the first time since when they had first met five years ago, Hiccup had been afraid of him.

What if he hit Hiccup? What if he hurt him and sent him to the forever place, as he had with Big Beard?

"Do it!"

Toothless reluctantly released a plasma blast in front of Hiccup, watched his rider flinch and flail and start spiralling down. Toothless cried out and dove for the young man, quickly manuvered under him so Hiccup landed on his back.

"Damn it!" Hiccup was almost lying atop Toothless, shaking and breathing heavily, as he clicked his prosthetic leg into the steering harness and automatically adjusted before they hit the harsh seas below.

Toothless shimmied beneath him and growled in alarm.

"I'm okay." He rubbed Toothless' head. "I'm okay." He took a deep breath, slowly released it and steered them back into a climb.

He hadn't expected to react so badly. He had to get over the fear of Toothless' fire, had to knock back that fear and replace it with the belief he'd had before, that Toothless would never hurt him. He had said that to Toothless when he was trying to break the Alpha's hold over the Night Fury, but he hadn't fully believed it then.

"Again." When Toothless hesitated Hiccup insisted, but the Night Fury struggled to turn back toward Berk. "We have to do this, Toothless! Again! Please!"

Reluctantly Toothless climbed back to their previous height. He moaned again, pleading with his rider not to do this. What if he hit him! Didn't Hiccup understand that he was afraid he would hurt him, as he had Big Beard?

Hiccup took several deep breaths, let them out, then released the securing tether and let himself slide sideways off Toothless' back, as he had a few days before. He disbursed the wings of his flight suit again, waited until he was stabilized, then called for Toothless to fire.

A blast landed in front of him, but this time he managed to adjust his course and ride over the blue fire. Yes! He was still shaking, but not as badly. "Again!"

Toothless let off another shot, then another and another until Hiccup was neatly avoiding each one. "Yea-ahh!"

Toothless barked happily for them both.

"One more, Bud!" This was the real test and as the blast appeared well ahead of him, he pulled his hands into his sides and flew through the disintegrating trail of the blast. He came out the other side, slightly singed, but deliriously happy.

He turned onto his back as Toothless hovered over him, grinning happily. "Woo Hoo! We're back," he laughed, flung his arms as far across the dragon's head as he could. "Aww, I missed you, I missed us, Bud."

They landed a short while later by the great hall and Toothless was so deliriously happy that they were a true team again that he was licking his rider all over.

"Awk! Okay! Okay!" Hiccup laughed and tried to push back the darting, slimy tongue. "I love you too!" He managed to get underneath to throw his arms around the dragon's neck and hugged him hard. "See. Told you we'd be okay," he murmured, so full of relief he had to cling to the dragon for support.

Toothless purred, dipped his head and put one paw around his rider, pulling him in for as close to a hug as a dragon could manage.

Everything worked and felt exactly as it had before, he was no longer afraid of his dragon and Toothless seemed to be less wary of hurting him. The relief in both of them was palpable.

When he entered the hall, he was surprised to see that only Astrid was still there, preparing worksheets for tomorrow.

How long had he been flying?

"Where is everyone?" he asked as he walked over to her.

"They ate and went home," she said. "I told them we'd let them know what was happening in the morning." She finally looked up and her eyes widened at the blackened smudges on his suit, face and hair. "What happened to you?"

"Oh...ah...just practicing some things with Toothless." He realized he wouldn't be able to just fly off on a whim anymore. He should have been here to talk to anyone. "Sorry. I didn't mean to be gone so long."

She shrugged. "It's fine. Are you hungry?"

"No, not right now. I think I'll just work on some plans for tomorrow." He took the chair she had just risen from.

"Do you want any help?"

"Um...It's all in my head right now. Maybe after I flush it out I can get your opinion."

She nodded. "Okay. But don't forget to eat."

"No. I won't." He watched her leave, then ran his hands through his hair and pulled the lanterns closer so he could see better. "You don't have to stay, Toothless."

Toothless stared, now where else did his rider think he should be? He curled up on the floor behind Hiccup.

Hiccup spent the next several hours making schedules, drawings and lists. He needed to organize, to plan. There was a need to clear and build faster, because at the rate they were going the village wouldn't be rebuilt for a couple of months at least, and that would put them smack into the worst of winter.

He had several ideas of what to do with all that extra ice. Fishlegs said that it was frozen at a temperature much higher than normal ice, so it would probably be perfect for preserving their meat stores, which now only lasted a couple of months with their current storage method.

He started a few sketches for bulkhead compartments to be constructed in their fishing boats. The ice should allow the fishermen to go farther to fish and still get it back to Berk with their catch unspoiled. Since the dragons arrived, the majority of their fish supplies went to them; more fish meant more for everyone.

He was so intent on what he was doing, trying to get all his ideas and designs down on paper, that he didn't realize how late it was getting, until he heard the door to the hall creek open.

"Hey?"

He glanced up at Astrid, surprised that he had to blink a few times to pull her into focus. "Hey."

"It's late, and you still haven't eaten anything, Hiccup."

"No. Yeah, I know. I'm not hungry." His attention immediately returned to the papers on the table. "I think if we build a storage locker onto the hall and pack it with some of that ice, it should stay cold enough that it will keep our meat and fish for months instead of just the few weeks."

"Well, that's a great idea, but..."

"And I've designed some new pulleys for the heavy lifting. I'll have to talk to Gobber about adding attachments for the dragon's harnesses, but it should let us move things twice as fast as we have been."

"That's good, babe, but you..."

He pulled out his list of chores and went over them with his pencil. "Can you and Fishlegs get started on the boats? We'll need them repaired as soon as possible so they can head out before the ice flows move down. Oh, and..."

Astrid pulled the pencil and list away from him. "That's enough, Hiccup."

"No, I just have to..."

"You've been up since sunrise and you hardly slept last night."

He'd been unaware she had been disturbed by his tossing and turning. "I'm fine, Astrid."

"You need to eat and you need to sleep." She firmly took his arm and pulled him to his feet. "Now come on."

"Okay, yes. I will." He gently shrugged her off and turned back to the papers on the table. "I just need to..."

"Hiccup!"

He flinched.

"You're exhausted and swaying on your feet." She peered at him, intently, noticed his bloodshot eyes. "Can you even see me?"

"Of course I can." Actually he could see two of her, which was even better. "Astrid, I appreciate you worrying, but I have to get this done."

"You can finish it tomorrow..."

"I won't have time tomorrow! I barely had time today to think, let alone stop and plan. I have to get a handle on this, I have to..."

She caught his shoulders, leaned in and kissed him until she felt the tension ease from his body.

"So, not fair," he murmured.

"You do have a handle on this. We do have time." She took his hand. "Now come home."

"But I..."

Astrid sighed and looked at Toothless. "Help me out here."

The Night Fury rose and slid his head between Hiccup's legs, throwing the new Chief completely off balance, so that Hiccup had no choice but to hang on as the dragon manoeuvred him into the saddle.

"Toothless!"

Astrid grinned and slid on behind Hiccup, wrapped an arm around his waist to keep him there.

"Wait! My notes..."

"Will be there in the morning."

"This is kidnapping," Hiccup stated, annoyed. "Isn't there a law against kidnapping your Chief?"

"Funny, I don't recall that law."

Toothless flew out the door and was in front of Hiccup's house moments later.

Valka leaned in the doorway, grinning. "I see you found him."

Astrid jumped down, reached for Hiccup and was amused when he pulled away and climbed down from the other side.

"He's pouting."

"I am not pouting!" he insisted, becoming even more annoyed when he had to brace his hand on Toothless because his body was suddenly

feeling the exhaustion. He hid his unsteadiness by methodically untying Toothless' harness and saddle. "I was trying to work."

"Well, come in and have something to eat," Valka suggested and when Hiccup froze and looked at her, warily, she laughed. "It's okay. Gobber cooked."

"Oh, okay."

Valka stepped back inside as Astrid rubbed Toothless' head.

"Grouch."

"I am not a grouch."

Hiccup pulled the saddle off then crouched to remove a bottle of liniment from the saddlebag. Pouring some of the liquid into his hand, he rubbed it over Toothless' back. The saddle sometimes agitated the dragon's scales when it was on all day, so he used the lotion to keep the Toothless' hide moist.

Astrid held out her hand, accepted some liniment and applied it to the Night Fury's other side.

"So..." Hiccup began, smirking at the delightful shimmies and purrs from the Night Fury from all the rubbing. "Are you...um...staying over again tonight?"

Astrid met Hiccup's gaze shyly over the dragon's back. "My house is still full, so if it's okay?"

"Sure!" he said far too quickly, and felt his face flush. Oh, for the love of Thor! Would he ever not do that around her? "Sure. That's...fine." He placed the cap back on the bottle and set it back in the saddle bag. "I guess the...is everyone else here too?"

"Just Gobber. The twins and Snotlout have their house back and Fishlegs is bunking with Meatlug I think."

"Oh." So, no twins hanging in his room tonight. "Good. I mean, okay. Okay, good."

Astrid continued to stroke Toothless. "Hiccup?"

"Hmmm?" He walked over to their small shed and set the saddle inside, then and grabbed a basket of fish.

"You were amazing today."

He shrugged as he walked back and offered the fish to Toothless. "Not really."

She touched his arm, waited until he looked at her. "Yes, really."

He looked away again, stroked Toothless' head as he held the fish up in front of the Night Fury. "Hungry yet, bud? You should be; you worked really hard today."

Toothless stared into his friend's eyes, rubbed against his face, and accepted the fish.

"Thank the Gods!" Hiccup sighed, relieved. "Okay bud, you finish that up. And come in when you're done." He kissed the dragon, affectionately. "If you want to." He waited until Toothless raised his head to look at him again. "Love you, Buddy."

Toothless purred then went back to eating his fish.

"Are ye two comin' in or not?" Gobber demanded from the doorway. "Meh stew won't be fit ta eat!"

"It probably isn't fit now," Astrid murmured to Hiccup and watched him grin as they stepped inside.

Hiccup washed the soot off his face and rinses his hair, then settled at the table. He was once again struck by how odd it felt to have the others sitting with him and not his father. His father's chair was in its usual corner, empty. It felt wrong, not having him here.

"That there food is for eatin' not buildin' a fortress, Hiccup."

Hiccup focused on his plate, noticed he'd pushed all of the meat and vegetables to the center. "Sorry, Gobber. I'm really not hungry."

"You need to eat something, Hiccup," Valka encouraged gently. "You've hardly had a bite in two days."

Three, Hiccup thought, but who was counting. He speared a piece of meat and put it in his mouth, chewed. The taste actually wasn't bad, but it still did nothing to increase his appetite. He picked up another piece, put it in his mouth automatically, then another, but didn't really taste the rest of his meal.

Gods, he was tired. Now that he was sitting still and not trying to think he just felt incredibly tired. This had to be one of the longest days he could remember. There was so much to do still, too much to do. He tried to remember the drawings he had made for the pulleys and counter measures, but the lines blurred in his mind. He needed more time, more daylight hours. He glanced towards the closed door and hoped Toothless would come into the house again.

## 6. Chapter 6

\_Eeek! Damn Muses, they go on and on! Sorry- another long one, I really have no control over it anymore. Please review! HTTYD not mine.\_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER SIX<strong>

Hiccup was startled to feel a gentle hand under his chin and his eyes fluttered open.



"You're about to drop into your food, Hiccup," Valka stated from behind him as she cupped his chin. The young man had fallen asleep sitting up. "Let's get you to bed."

He lifted blurry eyes to hers, tried to place her face. "Who?"

Valka knew he was half asleep so didn't take it personally. "Come on, son. Up you get."

"Son..." Why was she calling him son? Oh, oh yeah, he had a mother now, didn't he? A mother, but not father. What was up with that, anyway? Why did he have to have one or the other, why couldn't he have both at the same time? "Mom."

"Yes, Hiccup," Astrid offered gently. "She's your mother, now stand up."

"Okay." Hiccup rose, alarmed at how unsteady he felt. "Okay, Mom." It felt odd, saying it. Mom. Mother, Mama. Which did she actually prefer? He had no idea. "Astrid?" Was Astrid his mother? No, that couldn't be right. Gods, he couldn't think straight.

He just needed sleep, that was all. Just a couple of hours to clear his head, and this stupid double vision. Then he'd go back to the hall, find his mother and finish the plans he was working on. Wait, his mother was here, wasn't she? Oh! There was just too much to figure out! He needed to get things under control; he had to have a plan. How could he be Chief without a plan?

Valka started to guide him to the stairs, but he gently pulled away. "I'm okay," he said and absently kissed her cheek, his words were slurring. "Just tired. I'm just tired, Mom. I'm okay."

"I've got him," Astrid assured following behind Hiccup as he stumbled up to his room. "Night everyone."

Valka watched until they disappeared from the stairwell then touched her cheek. Had Hiccup meant to kiss her, or was he so exhausted he didn't even realize he had done it? She lowered her eyes and wrapped her arms around herself.

"He's a good lad," Gobber said as he refilled his mug. "He pushes himself too hard sometimes, but he's sense enough to slow down when he needs to."

Valka sighed and collected the dishes from the table. "I'm sure he does." She scraped the plates, then set them in the wash bucket. "Stoick did a fine job with him, a fine job." She rubbed her arms, suddenly cold. "I should have been here."

Gobber couldn't argue, he had seen the grief that Stoick had gone through when Valka was carried off by that dragon, and he had witnessed the isolation of a wisp of a boy growing up with an emotionally damaged father, no mother and less than accepting villagers.

"Well," he said as poured her a drink as well. "You're here now."

She sat down, took the mug and looked down at the amber liquid. "What

good am I now? He's grown already, he's a man. He hardly needs a mother around."

"Well now, I reckon every one, no matter what their age, needs a mother around."

"He misses his father." She shook her head, rubbed her eyes tiredly. "He needs his father."

"His father isn't here, Val, so you'll have to do."

"But, what can I possibly offer him Gobber? Gods! I haven't lived among people in twenty years! I can barely remember how to act, to speak half the time. What to say?"

Gobber shrugged, took another swig of his ale. "Act how ye want, say what ye want, that works for me, and it sure has worked for Hiccup." He set the stein down and held her gaze. "As for what you can offer him, you're his mother. Be his mother. He's never had one, and you've missed out on havin' a son. So both of you have plenty to offer each other, as I see it."

"But he's man now, Gobber! He's not a little boy anymore."

"Ach, he just looks like a man, but he's still got plenty of growin' to do." He reached forward and put his giant hand over her smaller one. "If he didn't want you here, Val, he'd have said so. He's never been afraid to express himself on that front, believe me."

She considered his words and took a sip of her ale. Making a face she pushed it away, she had forgotten the taste of spirits, but now she remembered that she had never cared for the beverage. "He won't sleep in Stoick's bed."

"No."

"But he should, he is Chief now and..."

"Val, ye won't get that lad in that bed, anymore than you'll get him in the Chief's chair, over there."

"But why?" she asked, curious. "I understand he's grieving, I...I miss Stoick too." But she was not as devastated as Hiccup had been, because even though they had briefly been reunited, Stoick's death had not affected her as badly. After all, she had really lost Stoick twenty years ago. "But he almost seems afraid of his father's things. That isn't natural, it isn't the Viking way, Gobber."

"No, but...Hiccup is not a normal Viking, and his and Stoick's relationship was...complicated."

"Did...did they...weren't they close?"

"Depends on what you call close. The last few years they were...ah...closer, I suppose then they had been, but before that." He shrugged again, finished off his ale. "Most people didn't understand Hiccup being...how he was, especially Stoick. It was hard on them both."

"Is that why he feels useless?" She shook her head, sadly. "When he

said that I felt so..." She tossed her hands in the air. Outraged? Distressed? Confused. "Ashamed," she finished quietly.

"Hiccup's complicated, but dinna you worry. That wee lass up there is all he needs to shake that nonsense off, she doesn't let him dwell on those kinds of things."

Valka glanced towards the loft. "That's another thing. Should I allow them to be sharing a room? Have things changed that much here, and...Do I even have the authority to deny them such a thing?"

"Well, I dinna know what your authority should be, Val, that's something you need to discuss with Hiccup, but I canna say for sure Stoick would have objected on the subject; given the current circumstances. Astrid has been good for Hiccup, and he for her. Stoick knew that and he also trusted the boy."

"She seems like a nice girl, and Hiccup obviously adores her."

"A fine lass," he agreed. "The two have been joined at the hip for near on five years now, the whole village knows how they feel about each other, and I dinna think there is anything to be worried about. They are betrothed, after all."

Valka nodded, then reached for her drink again. Maybe she could get used to it, she thought as she drank it down. It helped steady her nerves, even of it did taste like Yak's feet.

Up in the loft, Astrid was arguing with Hiccup, who had managed to wake up enough to protest sharing the bed with her again.

"You need to sleep too, Astrid." He dropped onto the blankets he had set by the window last night. "I'll probably just keep you awake."

"No you won't," she assured as she pulled off her armor and boots. "We can both sleep in the bed, Hiccup. Sleeping there will kill your back."

He rolled on his side away from her as all his earlier fears and doubts descended upon him tenfold. Would it always be this way? Would he always be worked to exhaustion and then kept away at night by the visions of his father's death?

"It's fine."

She stared at him, frustrated. "Will you at least take your flight suit off?" When he didn't respond she became angry, thinking he was ignoring her. "Hiccup!" Still no response.

She knelt beside him, pulled him onto his back and saw his eyes were still open, but were slightly glazed.

"Let's get your leather off at least?"

"I can't do this, Astrid."

"Do what? Undress?"

"Be a Chief. I can't be Chief!"

"Yes you can, you already are." She caressed his hair. "I have never lied to you, have I?"

"No."

"Then believe me when I say that you did a great job today. You really did."

"Really? Be honest, Astrid. You have to be."

"I am. I swear it on Odin."

He needed to sleep, but he knew that he wouldn't. When he closed his eyes the visions came again. Bludvist. Toothless. His father. And when his eyes were opened all he could think of was how much there was to do still!

"Dear Thor!" He took a deep breath and released a half sob of exhausted frustration. "I'm just...so tired."

"I know. Oh, babe, I know." She rose. "Come on, you need to at least be comfortable."

She helped him remove his armor, dismayed at how sluggish his moves were. "When was the last time you really slept, Hiccup?"

He shook his head. He honestly couldn't remember. "Before...maybe the day before the games. I don't know."

She rose and pulled him with her to the bed.

"Astrid..."

"Sshhh. Now let me try something." When she reached for the hem of his tunic he stopped her.

"We can't!"

"No! We're not..." She flushed. "We're not going to do that. This is something else, something nice. I promise, it will help you relax."

Reluctantly he let her pull his tunic off, and glanced towards the stairs, afraid his father might come up at any...He bit his lip and fisted his hands. Okay, so he didn't have to worry about that, but Gobber was still downstairs and so was his mother.

"Let's get your leg off."

He didn't argue this time and let her help in removing it.

"Now, lay on your stomach." He looked at her, worried. "It's fine. I promise."

A sound at the window caused them both to turn as Toothless climbed in. He walked over to nudge them both.

"Aww, thanks, Bud," Hiccup said rubbing his hand over the dragon's

head. "It's not the same without you here."

Toothless moved to his pad, blew out enough heat to make it comfortable, then turned around twice before settling.

Astrid grinned. "See, now we have a chaperone."

Hiccup scowled but was too tired to argue. He took a slow breath and stretched out, face down on the bed, cushioning his face on his folded arms. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Toothless, keep an eye on her, she's sneaky."

Astrid giggled as Toothless opened one eye, looked at him as if to say 'yeah right' then went back to sleep.

He felt the mattress depress as she sat next to him, then he hissed as he felt something cool being rubbed across his back.

"What is that?"

"Your liniment," she said as she started to work the lotion into his back with smooth, sure strokes. "I have to do this for my uncle sometimes, ever since he hurt his back a few years ago. It almost always puts him to sleep."

"It feels...nice."

She smiled. "I told you so."

Hiccup found his body relaxing, his lids growing heavier. Astrid was so good to him, so good for him. She was everything a man could want and his father...his father had simply adored her. She understood him as no one else ever had. He could be himself with her, truly and unconditionally, and she never sneered or turned him away when he was weak or unsure.

He began to wonder how he would be able to do any of this without her. Without his father was hard enough, but without Astrid...He couldn't imagine it, didn't want to ever consider it.

He could feel himself drifting, slipping into sleep when another thought invaded, He suddenly turned and sat up to take her hand. "Astrid?"

"Hey!" she scowled. "You're supposed to be asleep!"

"Let's get married."

"You already asked that question, remember? It's arranged for next..."

"No, I mean now, as soon as we can. I don't want to wait for the next harvest."

She stared at him, flabbergasted. "H...Hiccup! We...but we...we have to wait! We..."

"Why? Why should we wait? What's the point?" He caught her other hand. "I want you here with me. I...I need you here with me, now, not in eight months. I'm the Chief now, and I want you to take your place at my side, as my wife."

Astrid wanted to marry Hiccup more than anything, but suspected this was just a cry for help. He's lost his father and found his mother, became Chief and almost lost his best friend all in one day. Of course he was feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and he was still grieving over Stoick. He couldn't mean he really wanted to get married now!

"Hiccup," she began gently. "You're tired and you're upset. It's natural that you..."

"Yes I'm tired and upset, but that isn't why I want us to get married now, Astrid."

"But, Hiccup..." She stared at him and searched for the words to explain.

She was still in the process of learning to run a household from Gothi. Usually a girl's mother would start teaching her daughter at the age of ten, so she could be married off at fifteen, but when she was ten she was practicing to be a warrior, because both her parents had been killed. The year after that was when Hiccup found Toothless and life on Berk had completely changed. She became a trainer and a protector and a warrior. She'd had no time to think about the traditions of womanhood.

When Hiccup had originally asked her and made a bid for her hand, she'd agreed only with the stimulation that they had to wait a year for the ceremony. She had hoped to delay the marriage until she was properly trained, so as not to disappoint Hiccup or Stoick.

"There isn't time..." she hedged.

"You told me earlier there was time."

"But...but we have so much to do still and to try and plan a wedding..."

"We can do it. We can't do much work in the evenings anyway, so we'll schedule it then. We can have it in the hall. It doesn't have to be a big affair, just..."

"I...I'm not ready," she admitted, ashamed and lowered her head.

"What do you mean?" he frowned. "I...I thought you wanted to marry me?" He paused as he reconsidered her words, then flushed. "Or...you mean you aren't ready for...for that? I mean...I thought you were ready, you're always kissing me and...but if you aren't then..."

"Oh no! Oh, I do! I am!" She rose, bit her lip and turned away, crossing her arms over her chest. "I do want to marry you and that...That...I'm ready for." At least she hoped she was. "But...things have been so crazy lately and I...I kept putting it off..."

"Putting what off?" His eyes widened. "Oh come on! I thought you liked...Look, I know I'm not much to look at, but it won't be that bad, will it?"

She released a half laugh of frustration. "No. No, not...She sighed. "I mean, I've been putting off my training, with Gothi. I'm just on herb classifications and I still can't sew or cook very well and..."

Hiccup stared at her. Gothi? Realization dawned. "Oh for..." He rolled his eyes and held out his hand. "Come here."

She shook her head.

"Astrid, I don't want...to put my leg back on, and as tired as I am, I would prefer not to have to fall at your feet right now. Please come here."

"Gods!" She turned, aghast at her own thoughtlessness. "I...I'm sorry."

She moved back to the bed and sat down again, but refused to look at him. When he remained silent for several long moments, she lifted her head, curious if he had fallen asleep. He was regarding her intently, waiting patiently for her to look at him.

"I can't be your wife yet, Hiccup."

He pulled his good leg up, slid the other under it so he could sit more securely on the bed and reached for her hand to intertwine their fingers. "Astrid, I don't care about any of that."

"Oh, but you have to! You...I..." He couldn't have a wife that was unable to run the house when he was away, especially not when he was Chief.

"My father didn't have anyone to run the house for him, it was just us, and we managed just fine. I don't want you to be my wife, because I expect you to be a slave to my whims. To cook my food and...and sew my socks and mend my injuries." He cupped her chin with his free hand. "I know how to cook and I'm almost as good as Gobber with a needle and thread. I know how to wash my own clothes, and keep the house clean..."

"But you're not supposed to!" Astrid insisted, trying to ignore the warmth that was spreading through her, the thrill his words were causing inside her heart.

"Why? Why am I not supposed to?"

"It...It's not the way things are done!"

"Really?" He lifted an eyebrow, gave her a dry look. "When have I ever done anything the way it's supposed to be done?"

Astrid bit her lip; he had a point. "But...I don't want you to be...ashamed of me, Hiccup. I don't want others to think..."

"And when have I ever cared what other people think?"

"You have always cared! That's why you're so hard on yourself!"

Okay, point for Astrid. "I'll rephrase." He considered how to do that. "How often have you told me not to let what other people think bother me?"

Odin's Beard! Why did he have to be so smart? "This is different. This is marriage and...and tradition s..."

"Tradition states that a woman cannot be the right hand of the Chief, yet you agreed to be."

"Well...yes but..."

"It's not traditional, it's not 'how it's done' but you accepted that role. Are you saying you don't want it now?"

"NO! Of course I do, oh, Hiccup, I do, I mean it's an honor to be chosen, but I..."

He caressed her cheek. "Astrid, all I need from you is what you've always given me, unwavering support and love. The rest will come later, or will come in different ways. You have to know that ours will not be a traditional marriage." He smirked. "For one thing, you're stronger and tougher than I am, and a far better warrior."

"Hiccup! You don't give yourself enough credit and...and besides that doesn't mean anything! I can still be a woman! I can still be..." Her words were cut off as his lips pressed against hers and then they were completely obliterated from her memory.

When they parted, he pressed his forehead against hers. "I am completely aware that you are a woman, Astrid. I thank Odin for that fact several times a day."

She flushed with pleasure. "Oh for..." How could she have a proper argument with a man who said such things?

"You've been my friend for five years, my partner and confidant for three and..." He lifted her hand to his lips. "My soul mate for at least fifteen."

Astrid was sure she was going to melt into a puddle on the floor.

"I want you here, with me, helping me make decisions. Listening to me when I need to talk, and talking to me when I just need to listen to something, other than my own doubts. " He tapped her nose. "Making me eat and sleep and threatening me with bodily harm if I forget to do either. I need you to...to take care of the things I can't."

"There's nothing you can't do, Hiccup!"

"There are things I won't have time to do, things I may not remember or think to do, but you will, because you always have and I trust you to do them. You're the only one I could ever trust for that."

She sighed. He was making it harder to say no. "I'm here now. I can



do all that now, just..."

"Not legally. Legally you shouldn't be here. Legally, if something happens to me, you won't have the rights of a Chief's spouse."

"Nothing is going to happen to you, Hiccup!"

"Legally," he continued. "You're just another Chiefly delegate and have no real power."

"I...I don't need power..." But part of her wondered about what it would be like to do things the way she felt they should be done, to change things and make them better.

"If we were married you would have the right to do the things that need to be done in the name of the Chief."

She noticed how he kept using the third person and decided to put a stop to it. "In your name," she amended, watched him avert his eyes. "Say it. Say I'll have the right to do things in your name."

"I..." He picked at the pattern of her skirt. "Yes, in the name of ...the Chief."

"Hiccup." She cupped his other cheek, cradling his face and gently forcing him to look at her. "In your name."

"In...m...my name," he whispered and released an unsteady breath when she continued to stare at him, expectantly. It was easier to keep them separate, him and the Title. The Title, and then him. He was less afraid to think of them as separate. "To...To do things in..." Oh Gods! "In my name...as...Chief."

She slid her arms around his neck and pulled him close. "That was really hard for you, wasn't it?"

"I think...I think my heart's stopped."

She smiled and pulled one hand down to press to his chest. "Nope, still beating."

"Oh good." He paused. "So...now?"

"You're being very selfish, \_Chief\_."

"I am," he admitted. "Completely and unquestionably, but I wouldn't be trying so hard if I didn't love you so much, and if I didn't believe you wanted it just as much."

"And if you weren't delirious with exhaustion?"

"I'm \_not\_ that tired, Astrid." He was that tired, but he was still completely aware of what he was asking.

She sighed again, closed her eyes, then opened them. She did want to be with him now. She didn't want to have to go back to her house once the rebuilding was done, go back to taking care of her Uncle Fin and sleeping alone. She didn't want to have to wait to see Hiccup's handsome face in the morning, or have to say goodbye to him in the

evenings as they parted to go to their separate homes.

"This is crazy."

"Yes." he agreed. "Marry me."

"Hiccup..."

"Now, Astrid."

"But..."

"Please. Please, just marry me now. I'm ready now, you're ready now. It feels right to do it now."

It killed her to hear him beg and she lifted her head to meet his heartfelt gaze. "Oh, babe." He looked so earnest, and so damn tired. "You need to sleep."

"Not until you say yes."

"If I say yes will you sleep?"

"Are you saying yes?"

She took a deep breath and finally nodded. "Yes."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Yes, I'll marry you now, or...or as soon as we can arrange it anyway."

"Thank you." He crushed her too him. "I love you. I love you so much, Astrid."

Relief and love poured into her as she clung to him and realized he was right. They were both ready to do it now.

"Now, will you sleep?"

He pulled off his boot and slid under the covers, waited as she slid in beside him. "Are you kidding? I'm way to excited to sleep, now!"

"Hiccup!" She slapped at his bare chest, startled when he caught her hands and trapped them between them.

"Ssshhh." He kissed her, lovingly. "People are trying to sleep!"

She growled and curled up with her head on his chest, muttering. "Stubborn, mule-headed, sweet talking..."

Hiccup smiled and closed his eyes. He was actually asleep within seconds.

## 7. Chapter 7

\_HTTYD characters not mine. Well, I hope everyone is still enjoying my story so far. It has taken a totally different direction than I

had originally anticipated, but in a good way. Please read and review.\_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER SEVEN<strong>

Hiccup slept through the night, well almost. He'd awoken just before sunrise and found Toothless sitting at the end of the bed staring impatiently at him. The dragon hadn't pounced or nudged him awake as he usually did, probably because there was someone else in the bed as well.

He'd carefully extracted himself from Astrid, grabbed a bar of soap and a towel, and then quietly slipped out the window with Toothless.

He and Toothless took a nice morning flight around the island, then landed in the cove where they both had a thorough washing. Toothless, excited and playful kept splashing Hiccup every time he started to dry off, until Hiccup attacked and they began to wrestle.

He was just fastening the belts of his flight suit when Toothless lifted his head and purred excitedly.

Hiccup turned as Cloud Jumper landed beside them and Valka slid off. He offered them a playful bow. "Well, good morning, you two."

"Good morning." Valka noticed her son's hair was dripping wet. "Is it Saturday?"

He grinned. "No, but we like to wash the grime away before it starts to adhere to our skin." He rubbed Toothless head when the dragon prodded him affectionately. "Don't we buddy? And someone likes to splash too much."

Toothless practically grinned at him then wound around Valka for some rubbing, before greeting Cloud Jumper. The larger dragon, more stoic than the others, offered Toothless a light bow of his head in respect to his Alpha.

"I remember how hard it was trying to get Gobber to bathe at least once a month!" She chuckled. "Oh what a time that was!"

"Oh, Gobber still hates baths," Hiccup assured as he slipped Toothless' saddle back on him. "It's a bi-monthly thing now."

He grinned, remembering the idea last month to have Toothless nab the blacksmith, when he least expected, it and dump him in the pond, but Stoick had reasoned that might kill what fish were in there.

"Dad gets everyone involved to corral him and..." He paused as he thought how his father would not be instigating it this year and his amusement faded. "Yeah, so anyway."

Valka put her hand on his shoulder. "It will take awhile," she said gently. "To remember he's gone."

Hiccup nodded but didn't look at her, instead he concentrated on securing Toothless tail, which he had removed so they could bathe

properly. The fin didn't work as well when wet.

Valka crouched down beside him. "So, you made this?" She ran her hand over the mechanics. "Absolutely amazing. How does it work?"

Hiccup showed her and felt himself glowing from her praise. Finally, they stood and he asked. "How...how did you..." He paused and lowered his head. Maybe he shouldn't ask.

"Go ahead, Hiccup. You can ask me anything."

He took a deep breath and again concentrated on looking and petting Toothless. "How did you...get use to...being alone?"

"I'm not really sure. It was very hard the first several months," she admitted. "I'd wake up in Cloud Jumper's cave and immediately think I was back home. When I realized I wasn't it...well, it was like being taken all over again." She walked towards the pond, looked out over it. "For the first year or so I'd hear you crying, and go to pick you up then remember you weren't there. Or...or I'd hear the clomping of your father's boots as he came in from outside and bellow a greeting to me."

Hiccup watched his mother closely, watched the way her expressions changed with each memory, from sad to wistful, from joy to pain.

"He was the biggest man I had ever seen," she sighed. "As tall as a mountain and as soft as a down pillow." She chuckled. "When it came to me anyway."

Hiccup was drawn to her, he wanted...he wanted to go to her, hold her and take away the pain, but he didn't move from Toothless' side.

"He...didn't talk about you much," he admitted, quietly. "I think...I think it hurt him too much to talk about you, but I know he loved you. He did tell me that." He paused to consider his next words. "I asked him once, why he had never remarried. He said he loved you. Just you."

She turned to her son, marvelled at the man she and Stoick had created. "And I him."

"Then, why did you stay away?" The words were out before he could stop them and he immediately wanted to call them back. But, he found he needed to know, to really know. "I know you said that you thought people would be safer but...you...left us. Me and...and Dad. You just...let us think you were dead."

She nodded and there were fresh tears in her eyes. "I'm not proud of it, Hiccup, and trust me when I say that there wasn't a day that went by when I didn't think of you and your father."

"Then why, Mom!" He was surprised at the sudden anger rising inside of him. "I was your son! I was different too, just like you! Instead of coming back and showing me that there was...was someone like me, you left and you stayed gone and left me here, where there was \_no one\_ like me. I was an outcast for most of my life!"

"I couldn't, Hiccup! Oh, you must understand, you have to because

like you said, we were the same! I didn't want to kill dragons, and that made me a...a liability to your father, to you, to the entire village. When Cloud Jumper took me I...I realized that my life was better away from Berk. Better for everyone, and safer..."

"No, Mom, not everyone!"

He turned away and tried to reign in his temper. This wasn't like him. He hardly ever raised his voice to someone or let his anger get the better of him. He could only chalk it up to the hellish week he had gone through.

When he turned back he saw her slumped on a bolder, despondent.

"I'll leave," she murmured quietly. "It's better if I do, then..."

"There you go again, running away! Better for who, Mom? Who would it be better for this time?"

"Hiccup, I...I'm sorry. I..."

He moved to her, knelt on his prosthetic so his good leg could support him. "No, I'm sorry." He put his hands over hers. "I didn't mean to yell at you. I...I don't...I don't want you to leave again. I...I can forgive the first time, I can see you thought your reasons were valid and, in my heart, I know they were, but if...if you left this time. If you left this time you...you have to know that I...I couldn't forgive you."

She stared at her son's hands gripping hers, they were strong, callused, a Viking's hands, and yet his fingers were long and thin, almost delicate. She turned them over in her hands, ran her finger over the faded lines that crisscrossed his palms and remembered how Stoick had held their baby boy's tiny body in just one of his massive hands.

"I want to stay with you, Hiccup," she assured, gently. "I...I just don't know what I can offer you. You're Chief now, and you have a woman who loves you and people who respect you and...and... You're all grown up now." She lifted shimmering eyes to his. "And I missed it. I missed all of it! Your first steps, your first word, your first crush...I'm no mother at all!"

Moved beyond words Hiccup, searched for a response, then just decided to answer her questions. "I started walking when I was two," he stated quietly. "My first word was Gob...I think for Gobber, and Astrid is my first and only crush."

Her watery eyes shimmered as she put a hand to his cheek, reveled in the way he leaned into her touch. "I want to know it all, Hiccup. I want to know everything I've missed."

He couldn't tell her everything, because she would feel guilty and sad again, so he compromised and tried to tell her the basics. "Well, I like chicken, but I hate eel." He shuddered and made a face, which made her smile.

"I'm not overly fond of them either," she assured.

He grinned, liking that they had something else in common. "I'm not much of a drinker, compete lightweight, actually, but then I never really developed a taste for mead." He scrunched his forehead in thought. What else could he say? "I've been working in the forge with Gobber since I was about eight and my best friend is a Night Fury."

"Eight?" Her eyes widened. "Why so young?"

He shrugged. "Dad needed to do something with me. He was afraid to take me on any trips and he couldn't leave me home alone, so he would leave me with Gobber. I'd hang out at the forge and he'd give me little jobs to do to, you know, keep me busy and eventually I just started paying attention and working for him."

"Why didn't your father take you with him?"

He paused and considered how protective Stoick had been of him before Toothless. "He may have told you I'd be the strongest, but I don't think he ever really believed it."

"Oh, Hiccup."

"No, it...it's okay. I mean, I was really scrawny, Mom, I was lucky if I could lift half the weapons I helped Gobber make." He smirked. "And it wouldn't do to have the Chief's only heir blow away in a storm at sea."

"I'm sure you would have been fine, son."

He shrugged. "And, I was clumsy, kept doing more harm than good and that was a burden on Dad because the villagers complained a lot. I mean, I was a Chief's son and I was...well I was just such a...a Hiccup. You know? I was an embarrassment to him."

Valka caught hold of both Hiccup's arms. "Don't you ever say that! Your father loved you, Hiccup!" Didn't he, she wondered? Could Stoick really have changed so much after she left?

"I know...I know he did, Mom. I never doubted that." At least not very often, he added silently. "Please don't think otherwise."

He lowered his eyes and tried to find a way to explain his relationship with his father without putting it in a bad light or having to go through his entire, miserable childhood.

"Like you said, things were different here then, I was different." He shook his head. "None of that matters. What matters is everything changed when I found Toothless and Dad was...well we got along better, because I finally proved to him I could do something other than..." a screw up. A boy who destroyed things. An embarrassment? "I could be useful to him, finally."

"I'm sure he always felt you were useful." Valka's heart was slowly breaking for her son.

Hiccup ignored the comment. "The point is, he was my father, and a great man. I loved him, I really did, but I..." He felt the words coming, tried to pull it back, but couldn't seem to stop them now.

"I'm afraid I'll never be able to be the man he was, that I'll crush his legacy because I'm just...me."

"Hiccup, no." She kissed his forehead. "Your father would be proud of you, he really would. Stoick was a one Viking in a million, there is no doubt of that, but he had his faults, just like everyone else. And he wouldn't expect you to be anyone, but who you are. You...Trying to live up to his...him, to being him, is like trying to crawl into the skin of your Night Fury and become a dragon. You and I...we understand dragons, we live with them, work with them, and on some level grasp how they might feel, but we can never be them, Hiccup, and it's madness to try. You can never be more than what you are, but that doesn't mean you can't be just as great."

He stared at her, felt his eyes tear up and wished he wasn't so emotional all the time, so sensitive. "I just want to make him, proud, Mom."

"You will." She cupped his chin, kissed him gently. "You already have. Please believe that, Hiccup."

He took a shuddering breath. "It's...it's just all happening so fast."

"I know." She pulled him against her, gently, in case he wanted to withdraw. "Life does that sometimes, it can be going along at a nice, easy pace, and then suddenly everything is just...here, and you have to deal with it."

Slowly, shyly Hiccup slid his arms around her, closed his eyes. "I like this," he murmured. "Talking to you...being...held by you."

Her eyes filled. She had hugged only once him before, on top of a snow covered glacier, because she had been overwhelmed that he had forgiven her. "You don't find me pushy or an embarrassment to your friends?" she teased, because she was so overcome by emotion she had to do something to break the tension.

"Astrid is pushy and embarrasses me all the time, I'm pretty used to it." And secretly he adored that about his girlfriend. He pulled back enough to look at her. "And anytime you want to...do this, you can. Really, anytime."

"Well now." She pulled him in close again, held him tighter. "You may be sorry you gave me permission."

"You don't need permission. You're my mother."

And the tears she was struggling so hard to hold back, burst through. "I may have to do this at least twice a day."

Hiccup closed his eyes again and wondered if he would ever get used to this strange warmth that spread through him at her touch. "Once every meal, got it."

She chuckled and smiled at him. "You have your father's sense of humor."

"Dad?" Hiccup's eyebrows rose. "A sense of humor?"

"Oh yes, and a very good one."

Hiccup tried to remember his father being funny and he couldn't. He was always firm about how to do things, except with Gobber. They laughed sometimes, but he never really knew what about.

His knee was falling asleep and so he reluctantly released her, rose, and offered her a hand up "How about I show you Berk, the way it should be seen?"

"Well, Cloud Jumper and I went for a ride this morning..."

"And that's great, but let me show you how a Night Fury sees it."

Valka had been on the backs of dozens of dragons, but this...this was different. This would be a ride with her son, on his dragon; a Night Fury.

She had only seen a Night Fury once before, a little over fifteen years ago and he had just been a fledgling really, perhaps only a few years old. The Night Fury had never let her get close enough to befriend it; he just flew around their island with a surprising caution. The other dragons had also avoided the Night Fury, which she had found odd, for them seemed reasonably welcoming to their own kind.

She had noticed a sorrow in The Alpha's eyes that day, as he watched the Night Fury come close, hover then fly away again. He seemed to understand why the black dragon would not land, and never tried to persuade it with its Alpha powers. Valka realized then that Night Fury's were solitary creatures by nature, uniquely feared or shunned even by their own kind. It was the one dragon she had ever seen could never be tamed, which is why it had been such a shock that her son rode one.

She had learned of the additional flight fins that she had exposed on Toothless by another dragon, a Bolt Charger, which was similar to a Night Fury, but not nearly as powerful or fast, and certainly not as solitary. She hadn't been sure it would work, actually, but as Toothless had allowed her to touch him, she thought it couldn't hurt to try.

"Do you mind, Cloud Jumper?" she asked her old friend and the dragon declined his head regally.

Tentatively, she accepted Hiccup's hand and climbed onto Toothless back. She waited until he had settled in front of her and secured himself to the saddle.

She paused and wondered, if Toothless could be the same young dragon that had been too skittish to come near her? She had never seen another Night Fury, not in over a decade. Could he be the same one who and deliberately chosen a solitary life rather than live in the commune with the Alpha and the other dragons?

Her Alpha had never tried to control his dragons as Bludvist's had; they stayed because they wanted to. Was that why Toothless had connected with her son, not because he had tried to compensate for hurting a dragon, but because they were both so unique, so different?



She frowned. Because they were both so alone?

"So..." She began, swallowing the sudden lump in her throat. "How fast can he go?"

Hiccup grinned. "You'll see." Toothless, eager to show off jumped into the air and they were off.

Valka, who had learned the art of balancing on dragons found herself grabbing Hiccup's waist in surprise. "Oh my!"

He smiled back at her and urged Toothless even faster. "Let's show her what you can really do, Bud."

Toothless did not disappoint. He shot through the air and for the next twenty minutes performed a number of daring maneuvers as his rider instructed.

The sun was just starting to spread its morning colors across the sky as they shot into the clouds.

"He is amazing!" Valka cried; throwing her arms in the air, much as Astrid had done the first time she had ridden on Toothless.

Hiccup laughed then finally turned back towards Berk and landed by the food stables.

His mother slid off of Toothless and immediately moved behind him to inspect the tail fin more closely. "You did all this," she sighed in wonder. "He needs you to fly and you need him..." She rose and stared at her son, whose face was flushed from the ride, his hair everywhere and a crooked smile on his face. "And you need him," she finished simply.

"Yeah."

She spun around. "Oh, Hiccup! There's so much to tell you, so much more to show you!"

"I have a book!" he admitted quickly. "A book that Fishlegs and I have been doing all about dragons. Actually, it's more a series of books now, but there's so many gaps still. There were lots of things we didn't know, things we had to learn about the dragons we encountered, like the Screaming Death..."

"Screaming Death? What is that? I've never heard of one."

"It's actually a Whispering Death," he grinned, eager to be able to teach her something, to impress her as she constantly impressed him. "But bigger, and white, and it makes this horrible screeching sound that messes with the dragon's ability to focus. Oh, and sunlight doesn't affect it. I think they must be pretty rare. It hatched from a selection of Whispering Death eggs that Alvin put under the village to destroy Berk."

"Alvin the Treacherous?" Valka's gaze softened. "He attacked Berk? Did...did Stoick kill him?"

Hiccup blinked in surprise. "Uh...well we didn't know it was him at the time, but anyway they actually became friends, sort of. In the

end."

Her eyes widened. "Really?"

"Did you know Alvin, Mom?"

"Yes."

He took a leap. "Do you know why Dad hated him so much? Why he banished him?"

"Your father had his reasons."

"That's what Dad said, but..."

His mother quickly changed the subject as she ran her hands over Toothless, eagerly. "He's so fast! I can't get over how fast he is, and you, you ride him like the two of you were one!" She looked at him, excited. "That's how it should be! That is just how it should be, and I..." She started to move forward, to hug him and pulled back.

"What's wrong?"

"I...nothing. I'm just so...glad we have something in common."

He smiled and shyly held his arms out. "Twice a day it is."

She threw her arms around him again, squeezed him tight, then squealed when he actually lifted her off her feet.

Toothless huffed in his ear, impatiently.

"Oh, geez. Sorry, Bud." He walked over to one of the many baskets of fish, pulled it out and dumped it in front of Toothless. "There you go." He rubbed Toothless' head and looked at Valka as Cloud Jumper landed behind her. "You ready for breakfast Big Guy?"

The large dragon nodded and politely accepted a basket of fish.

They walked to the Chief's house, the village was just starting to wake up. "I just have to grab something, I'll meet you at the hall."

She nodded and headed towards the steps leading to the main meeting place on Berk.

Hiccup entered the house and headed upstairs. Astrid was just putting on her armor. "Morning, Milady."

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, here and there." He went to his desk to grab his personal notebook and pencil.

"You seem better today." She moved closer to look him over with a critical eye. "You've still got bags under your eyes, you need more sleep."

"I'm fine, Astrid, really." He kissed her cheek. "I slept for several

hours last night."

"Through?"

He shrugged. "Mostly." He'd only had one nightmare that had awakened him. He slid his arm around her and effectively changed the subject. "Did I mention I love waking up next to you?"

"I wish I could say the same, but you're always up before me." She poked his chest. "\_When\_ you sleep."

"Early sheep spins the wool." He kissed her cheek, caught her hand. "Come on, whole new day and lots to do."

Astrid was a little disappointed that he didn't bring up getting married again, and wondered if he even remembered it. He had been so tired yesterday. "Right. Where do we start?"

"Breakfast at the hall, then..." He wiggled his notebook. "Plans and preparations."

So much had changed in such a short time. It was true what he had admitted before; he wasn't the man his father was, and he wasn't the Peace keeper he believed himself to be either. It seemed, in this world, he couldn't afford to be. But he had a job to do, a duty to his people, to Astrid and now to his mother. It was time to grow up, to be a man and to protect his own.

## 8. Chapter 8

\_Thanks so much those of you that took the time to review, it means an awful lot! I know I am dwelling on day by day at the moment, but there is a method to my madness and I am not exactly sure how far I am going to continue the story, or if I want to get too far ahead in the future. Right now it is all just pouring out of me, so as long as the flow keeps going I will.\_

\_HTTYD characters do not belong to me in any way shape or form. \_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER EIGHT<strong>

Valka entered the Chief's house and moved to the back room for her cloak. The mid-morning chill was starting to seep into her bones. She stepped back into the main room and her keen hearing picked up a soft whimpering coming from upstairs. Everyone was outside working so she couldn't think of what it would be.

Instincts kicked in and she carefully crept up the stairs, unaware that she was on all fours again, and moving more like a dragon than a human. She poked her head cautiously into the loft, spotted her son slumped over his desk, a charcoal pencil in his hand and his head cushioned on his folded arms.

Again, moving with a stealth that was totally unnatural for her species, she sidled up to Hiccup and confirmed the whimpering was coming from him. Her son was dreaming, and it did not sound like he was enjoying it.

She slipped her hand into his hair, brushed her fingers over his head in slow, soothing strokes. Within moments he had quieted. "Oh, my poor boy," she whispered. He must have come in to do more work and collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

She looked at Toothless who was curled up on his pallet watching her. She didn't think she'd be able to move Hiccup to the bed, even with the dragon's help, and she didn't want to risk waking him because he would just go back to work. He needed rest, whether he would admit it or not.

In the end she simply retrieved a blanket and gently placed it over her son. It was then that she noticed all the papers spread across the desk. What were these amazing designs for, she wondered? She inspected one drawing after another, awestruck that her son had created them. Some looked like pulleys with weighted counter-measures. Others appeared to be configurations of his prosthetic. There were several drawings that she simply had no idea of what they could be.

She spotted one just beneath his elbow and carefully pulled it out. Her eyes widened. It was her, in her riding gear and mask. He had drawn almost an exact likeness. "Oh, Hiccup," she whispered, and traced the title he had written across it, Mother of Dragons. Another paper caught her eye and she teared-up at the drawing of her and Stoick dancing, this one titled Marriage.

There was a knock at the door downstairs and she quickly moved down to answer it.

"Hey Mrs...er..."

"Just Valka is fine, Fishlegs."

"Right. Okay. Have you seen Hiccup? Everyone is kinda looking for him and..."

"He's here, working, and he can't be disturbed."

"Oh, well I just needed to ask..."

"He can't be disturbed, Fishlegs. I am sorry, but whatever you have to ask will have to wait."

Fishlegs was startled by the no-nonsense tone in her voice. "Ah...oh kay. Just...let him know when he's done I need to talk to him."

"I will." She closed the door and no sooner had she done so when someone else knocked. After the fourth person, she called for Cloud Jumper to guard the door and not allow anyone else near it.

Deciding to remain in the house, in case anyone else tried to disturb her son's slumber, she settled down to work on the cloak she had started for Hiccup. Every Chief should have a proper cloak. There was a spare one of Stoick's hanging on the wall, but Hiccup wouldn't go near it, so she had decided to make him one herself from bits and pieces of leather and furs she had found in a trunk in Stoick's room. Humming softly to herself, as she worked, she smiled when Toothless wandered down and sat beside her, soothed by the sound.

It was several hours later when she heard Gobber arguing with her dragon. She rose, hid the cloak back in the main bedroom and went to the door.

"Val, will ya tell your guard dragon here to let me pass?"

"It's all right Cloud Jumper."

The large dragon lifted his massive wing, which had been blocking the door, and allowed Gobber to move through.

"Is Hiccup here, Val?"

She nodded and closed the door. "Yes, but he's sleeping and I don't want him disturbed. He's hardly had any sleep since we got back."

Gobber nodded, kindly. "Aye, he needs it. I'm surprised you got him to have a lie down."

"I didn't, he passed out at his desk."

"Ach, stubborn idiot."

She smiled at him. "Will you need to stay again tonight?"

"Nah, my house is about done, I can stay there."

Val paused as she poured herself some water. "I think you should stay, Gobber."

"Why?" He smirked. "Afraid to be alone with your son, Val?"

She glared at him, then slowly shrugged. "Perhaps. Anyway, I think Hiccup likes having you here, a...a man's presence in the house."

"Ach, alright then, one more day, but you two will have to get used to livin' together on yer own eventually, ye know."

She nodded. "I know."

They turned at the sound of a thump and click on the stairs and watched Hiccup step down, a handful of papers in his hands.

"Mom. Gobber." He ran his hand through his hair. "What time is it?"

"Oh, mid afternoon."

Hiccup's eyes widened. "What! Why did you let me sleep so long?"

"Because you needed it, Hiccup," Valka insisted. "You were exhausted!"

>"I was fine..."<p>

"You passed out at your desk."

"No...well, yes, but I just had a headache." He'd only meant to close his eyes for a minute, now here it was almost four hours later. "You should have woken me. I can't be sleeping when everyone is out working and..."

Gobber stepped forward. "Quit yer bellyachin'! Everything what can be done is bein' done." He opened the door. "Now if yer so eager to work, come with me and we'll get 'er goin'."

"Don't be angry with me, Hiccup," Valka pleaded.

Hiccup sighed and moved to her. "I'm not." And he wasn't. He was more clear-headed, so he supposed the sleep did him good. "I didn't mean to snap, I'm just..."

"Busy, yes. I know." She patted his back. "Go on then."

Hiccup was relieved that, even while he slept they had made progress. They had managed to clear the majority of the ice away from the main buildings of the village, had rebuilt two more homes and made four others liveable. The stable had also been rebuilt, as they needed to have somewhere to house the livestock properly.

Hiccup was bent over the main tool table in the forge with Gobber, looking over the map he had drawn of the village.

"So we've started on this section here," Gobber advised the new Chief. "Should be halfway done by noon tomorrow, and we can do some of the interiors by lamp-light tonight if we need to."

Hiccup nodded and indicated the main dock area. "We've cleared the ice here, but the docks are in pieces. How long before we get a crew down there to work on them?"

Gobber rubbed his chin. "Well, my best men will be with me in the south quarter, I'll need them for the main structures of the homes there, but I can probably spare Mulch, Bucket and Sven to get started, once the debris is cleared."

"I can do that," Snotlout offered with a wide yawn, as he and the twins entered. "There are plenty of youngin's up at the gorge, they can cart away the wood and it will give them something to do." He yawned again.

"Didn't you sleep last night?" Hiccup asked him, and felt a moment of guilt that he'd had a nap today.

"Nah, I was too busy with Fishlegs and...Ooof!"

Ruffnut elbowed the stout Viking.

"Er...I mean...well, you know how it is when you're not in your own bed."

Tuffnut made a show of yawning and stretching. "Yeah, you know, it's hard getting comfortable in a strange place."

Hiccup frowned. "I thought you guys slept at home last night? Astrid said there was room again at your houses."

"Uh...yeah...yeah we did, but..." Ruffnut smacked her helmet. "What he meant was, well, we got used to...to sleeping at your place and...and then we had to go back to ours and it was...like, strange."

Hiccup stared at them. "After one night?" What in the name of Thor was going on?

"Anyway," Gobber began, glaring at all three riders. "Back to business."

" Hiccup!"

Hiccup turned as Fishlegs hurried into the forge.

"Can I borrow some paper from your room?"

Hiccup pulled out his notebook. "I have some here."

"Ah, no, no, I'd rather have the paper from your room, if that's okay?"

"What's the difference, Fishlegs? It's exactly the same."

"Oh, I...I know, but that...that paper you have has been...ah...touching the other paper and I...uh...need paper that's ah...loose and not...not part of a...a collective."

Hiccup watched the hefty Viking flush and shuffle. "What..." he asked, baffled. "What?"

"I...I just need it from...from your room." Fishlegs looked everywhere but at Hiccup. "Um...please?"

Hiccup rolled his eyes and waved his hand. "Sure! Go ahead." Whatever his friend's were up to, he'd find out eventually. "Wait, did you inventory the storehouse yet?"

"Yep! Absolutely. Already done and Astrid has the list. Oh and I added what supplies we needed to increase for our winter stores and where we can find them. And, oh I also had a look at your drawings for increasing the storage and using ice bins, I think we can actually build the bins into the wall and then just stack the ice in them. It will also insulate the store room, really well."

"Wow!" Hiccup's eyes widened, impressed. "That's...great, Fishlegs. Really! Thanks."

"Sure...\_Chief\_." He giggled and toddled off.

"Chief's pet," Snotlout murmured under his breath, and received a slap in the head from Gobber. "Well, he's making the rest of us look bad!"

Hiccup grinned. "Trust me, all of you are doing a fantastic job, and I really do appreciate it. I couldn't do any of this without you."

"That's right." Needing to restore some of his masculinity Snotlout added and flexed his biceps. "Because we are awe-some."

"Weren't you going to go take care of those docks?" Gobber reminded him. "Take those two with you."

The riders left and Hiccup pulled out the drawing he had made for the new storage compartments in the boats. He and Gobber discussed them and made notes as necessary. Hiccup absently glanced at his to do list as they talked, marking off things, adding things, multi-tasking.

Gobber beamed at him with pride, whenever the boy wasn't looking. He was acting and sounding like a real Chief, taking charge and getting things done. Stoick would be so damn proud of him.

"So, what are Fishlegs and the others up to?"

Gobber looked at him, with a less than convincing bewilderment. "I've no idea."

"Gobber, nothing happens on this island without your knowing it. Now give."

Gobber snorted and lifted his head. "Is that an order from my commander and Chief?"

Hiccup flushed and lowered his head. "No."

Gobber laughed and slapped Hiccup on the back. "I dinna think so."

"Just please tell me it doesn't involve anything that explodes, will have us rebuilding something else, or starting a war with someone?"

"No, no, Nothing like that."

Hiccup pounced, pointed his pencil at the blacksmith. "So you do know!"

"I know a great many things. For instance, I know that you're about to have a surprise."

"Huh?"

"Um...Chief?"

They both turned towards a young woman standing at the entrance of the forge with a bundle in her arms and a hesitant young Viking at her side.

The young man cleared his throat. "S...sorry. Chief, could we have a word?"

When Hiccup didn't respond Gobber poked him.

"What?" Hiccup hissed, his eyes glued in a mild panic to the squirming bundle.

The blacksmith indicated their visitors. "You're the Chief, dummy."



Hiccup flushed. "I know!" He stepped forward. "Uh...hi. Cuyler, right?"

The young man nodded pleased. "And this is my young wife, Arvind."

Hiccup nodded at her, she about his age, he suspected. "Hi."

"We know you have so much to do," she said, shyly. "But, our baby has been waiting for a name for almost a month now, and..."

Oh Gods! Hiccup frantically searched his memory for how his father had handled this.

"Right, right..."

There were so many more important things that needed his attention, but he remembered his father saying that there was no task too small for a Chief. Each little thing means a lot more to the people you do it for than it does to you.

"Ah...Did...Did you have a...a name in mind for your ...uh..."

"Our daughter," Cuyler stated and then glanced uneasily at Gobber. "Well...we..."

"The \_Chief\_ usually names the children of the tribe," Gobber reminded Hiccup, quietly.

Odin's Beard! He knew that! Why did he forget that? "You...Yes, yes he does...um...I do. Okay, so...ah..." A name. A girl's name. He could only think of two and they were both taken!

"You could hold her," Arvind suggested, kindly, seeing the new Chief's sudden discomfort. "Maybe...maybe that would help?"

Gobber placed a firm hand at Hiccup's back when the poor lad lost all color and automatically stepped back, away from the baby.

"O...okay." Hiccup had never held a baby in his life! Oh, Gods, what had his father done? Why couldn't he remember?

Arvind carefully set the child in Hiccup's arms and he stared down at her wide eyed.

"Maybe give the Chief a minute with the child, to think of a proper name?" Gobber suggested as he gently nudged Hiccup towards the back of the forge.

Stoick had been just as nervous the first time he had named a child, and the name he had chosen had been so inappropriate, he promptly went through the naming books and started memorizing names for future children. Gobber figured he'd better dig out those books again for Stoick's son.

"What? Wait! Alone?" Hiccup whispered frantically.

"You'll be fine." Gobber assured and moved back towards the front and

the anxiously waiting couple.

Toothless followed Hiccup and moved closer, sniffed at the child, then looked up at Hiccup.

"I know, right?" Hiccup said in disbelief, then caught sight of his work bench and carefully settled the squirming bundle upon on it, worried he might drop her the way his arms were shaking. "Okay, so...so I guess we...we have a look?"

Toothless huffed, he knew nothing about babies.

Hiccup carefully pulled back some of the wrapping to see the child's cherub face and a pair of deep blue eyes staring at up him. "Oh wow! Those...those are some pretty incredible eyes you've got there."

Toothless placed his paws on the bench to rise and look down at the baby. The child immediately gurgled and reached for him.

"She likes you, bud."

Toothless looked at Hiccup pleased, bent his head so the child could touch his nose. He inhaled, then looked at Hiccup with approval.

The child caught one of Hiccup's fingers as she grinned up at him, and he noticed she had no teeth. "Huh." Did babies have retractable teeth too? That didn't make much sense. "Toothless II?"

Toothless glared at him and huffed.

"You...you're right, that would probably be a cruel for a baby." Though no more so than Hiccup. "She's really cute, though." He smiled when she squeezed his finger. "Pretty strong, too. You...you'll have to be patient with me, little one, I've never named a child before. You're my first, actually."

Hiccup was completely unaware that Astrid had entered through the back and was watching him from behind one of the half walls.

The child wiggled her hands and feet and reached with her free hand for Toothless again. The dragon set his head on the table and she tried to reach for him. Sensing a game, he'd flick his ear towards her, then pull it up before she could get a grip. Finally, he let her catch the tip and she immediately pulled it into her mouth and started sucking on it.

When Toothless pulled back, startled by the wetness of the baby's mouth, she scrunched up her face and began to wail. The dragon looked at Hiccup, who looked back, just as horrified, but then the baby remembered Hiccup's finger and she put that in her mouth instead.

"Uh...okay. That's just...weird." But she was quiet again. She really was a lovely little thing, but it was her eyes that captured him most. They were the color of the ocean, and appeared to be just as deep.

"Seagryd?" The word just spilled from his lips and the little girl smiled up at him. "Seagryd. Do you like that name?" She gurgled and

clutched his finger tighter.

"Good job."

Hiccup almost jumped out of his skin at the sound of Astrid behind him. "Don't do that!" He put his free hand to his heart, then checked he hadn't accidentally pulled the child off the table. His eyes narrowed, on Astrid. "How long have you been there?"

"Long enough." She reached up, kissed his cheek. "It's a beautiful name, Hiccup."

"Really?"

She nodded.

"You could have helped you know."

"Nope, this is totally your thing."

"Great. Fantastic," he returned, dryly, as he carefully rewrapped Seagryd and pulled her awkwardly into his arms again.

They both took a moment to look down at the baby.

"Aww, she's so pretty."

"Isn't she?" Hiccup smiled as the child reached up to grip his finger again. "She likes my fingers." He rocked the baby. "Don't you? You like to chew on fingers, huh?"

Astrid was suddenly struck by how perfect he looked with a child in his arms. She flushed wondering what it would be like when he held their child.

"Our first baby," he grinned, then realized how that sounded. He meant to say his first naming, and since Astrid was there he had included her; as he intended to include her in all things, once they were married.

Astrid swallowed hard when he turned the smile he was aiming at Seagryd on her. No wonder the little girl was totally enthralled. Did Hiccup have any idea how gorgeous he was, and how devastating that crooked little smile of his could be? She already knew the answer, of course. He had no clue.

"Hiccup," she began, putting her hand on his arm, looking at the baby then at him. "Do you...I mean...when we...Have you..."

Thankfully Hiccup seemed to read her mind, for his smile faded, just a little at the sudden seriousness of her tone. "Yes," he admitted, then blushed. "But...not...not..."

She nodded in understanding, and a mild sense of relief. "Not right away."

He held her gaze. "A girl," he murmured as the thought occurred to him. "One who looks just like you."

She smirked. "What if I want a boy that looks just like you?"

He groaned and shifted the child, pulling her up against his chest without realizing how natural the movement was. "Poor kid."

Astrid smacked his arm. "Stop it."

"How's it going Chief?" Gobber asked, startling them both back to the present.

"I've got it, I think." Hiccup met Astrid's gaze once more, then allowed Toothless to give the baby a quick nuzzle, before carrying her back to her parents.

With some relief he handed the girl back to her father. "By my right as Chief, and in the name of Odin, the Almighty, I name this child Seagryd, first born daughter of Cuylar and Arvind and newest member of the Hooligan Tribe."

The young couple stared at him, wide eyed, and then the woman burst into tears

He did it wrong! He was sure that was what his father said when naming a baby; he could recall that much at least. Maybe it was the name? Maybe he gave the wrong name? "I...I'm sorry. I thought it...it suited her because of her eyes and..."

His words were cut off when Arvind threw her arms around him.

"It...It is beautiful," she sobbed. "To give her such a...a beautiful name." She stumbled back, embarrassed for her rude behaviour. "Oh! Oh, I'm sorry!" One didn't just go around throwing themselves at the Chief!

Cuylar smiled gratefully at Hiccup. "Forgive my wife, Chief. She...It is...a good name. We did not believe we would receive such...such a good name."

"Oh, well, good. I...I'm glad you like it then."

Arvind sniffed again and lifted water eyes to Hiccup's. "Thank you."

He nodded and watched them walk away, then felt Astrid's arm slide around his waist. "Very well done."

"I...think I'm about to be sick."

She helped him settle on a stool, watched him drop his head into his hands. "Why, you did great?"

"I know, but..." The pressure of having to name a child, of deciding what that child will be called for the rest of their lives was...overwhelming. Sure he found one today, out of the blue and probably on blind luck, but what about the next time, and the time after that?

He looked up at Gobber. "How...how often will I need to do that?"

"Oh, usually just once every few months or so." He patted Hiccup's shoulder and made a mental note to find those naming books. "Dinna worry, you'll get use to it."

\* \* \*

><p><em>\* so has anyone guessed what Fishlegs and the other riders are up to? ;-)<em>

## 9. Chapter 9

\_HTTYD not mine. So, this chapter is a little shorter than the others, and a tad separate from the flow, but not completely, so I think it still works. (Am I updating fast enough? LOL) \_

\_This scene came to me because of a review from razor95, who asked about Eret (see how easily I can be influenced? ) and then it got stuck in my head. I hope you like how I have written it.\_

\_As always, thanks so much for all the reviews and please keep them coming.\_

### \*\*CHAPTER NINE\*\*

Hiccup landed by the waterfront, where several men were starting to hammer in new boards for the docks.

"Ho, Hiccup!" one of the men waved.

"Hey guys! How's it going?"

"We'll have her done by tomorrow, or day after."

"Looks great," Hiccup nodded. "Do you think you can extend it about three feet more?"

"Aye, Gobber suggested that very thing this morning, no worries."

"Awesome." Hiccup's eyes settled on Eret, who was quietly pulling boards as they were needed. None of the men really looked at him.

Hiccup had been hearing little things throughout the village about people's feelings for the former dragon trapper. Many didn't feel it was proper for him to have given an outsider Stoick's dragon, although they would never admit that to their new Chief. He had learned of it from Fishlegs that a lot of them didn't trust Eret, and some even blamed him for what happened to Stoick and with Drago. Vikings were legendary for placing blame, especially his tribe, but Hiccup realized that he still had to take their feelings into account.

He believed that Eret had proven himself to be a good man, so he just needed to show the people of Berk that they were wrong about him. According to Astrid, Eret was sleeping down at the academy stables, rather than ask anyone for a bed, and that would not do at all.

"Eret, come take a ride with me."

The muscular man paused, and noticed the way the other Vikings studied him. "Me?" he repeated, surprised.

"Yeah. I need to talk to you about something."

"Oh. Oh, well, okay." Eret set the board in his hands down, walked over and hesitantly climbed on behind Hiccup.

When Toothless hopped into the air and took off at a high rate of speed, Eret's hands gripped Hiccup's shoulders involuntarily.

"Blimy! She's faster than the Nadder."

"He," Hiccup corrected. "And there aren't many dragons who can out-fly a Night Fury."

"Yeah, no doubt."

Hiccup steered Toothless into a slower, steadier flight. "So... How are things going?"

"Hmmm?" Eret was staring down at the village and swallowing, hard. "Huh, what? Oh...things. Fine. Fine."

"Are you settling in okay?"

"Oh, well...I don't need much, you know." Eret wondered if he would ever get used to this whole flying on dragons thing. "Um...listen. I...ah...never really got to say...you know...sorry, about your dad."

"Thank you."

"I...uh...never knew him, but...ah...everyone says he was a great...great man and ah...well, he must be to...have you, you know...as his son."

Hiccup was touched by the older Viking's words and allowed himself a small smile. "He was a great man," he agreed, quietly. "You remind me of him."

Eret's eyes widened in surprise. "Me? H...how?"

"You're both strong men, stubbornly set in your ways." Hiccup glanced back and smirked. "But you were both willing to change when you needed to. You both fought for a cause." He turned back and stared at the clouds racing past, closed his eyes and envisioned his father in battle. "Both a hero."

Eret swallowed, moved beyond words. Who was this kid? "I...I'm no hero."

Hiccup took a deep breath and pulled himself out of his melancholy. "Astrid says you are, and one thing you'll have to learn, Eret, is never argue with Astrid."

"Actually, I have learned that," Eret chuckled nervously. "But, I'm

pretty sure no one else shares her...or your opinion."

"They'll get used to you," Hiccup assured. "Just give them a chance to get to know you."

"Well, I...I think they've already made up their minds on who and what I am."

"Then change their minds."

"People, especially Vikings, don't change minds easily."

"Astrid and I changed yours."

Eret considered that, and couldn't help wondering why Hiccup was so interested in the first place. Why wasn't he blaming him as the others did?

He had to admit, he had been incredibly impressed with the dragon rider, from their first meeting, especially when he'd surrendered in order to find out where Drago was. That took guts and lots of it. The kid may look like he blow away in a stiff wind, but he was solid as granite

"I reckon I'm not the best at changing people's mind, so much." He smirked. "I don't have your talent for talk."

Hiccup shrugged. "Born from necessity, I assure you." He directed Toothless around the island to where Mildew's old place sat on the hill. "So, what do you think?"

"About what?"

Hiccup landed and pointed at the house. "It needs a bit of work, been empty for awhile, but it's yours if you want it."

Eret looked at Hiccup in shock, then slowly slid off the dragon. "I...don't understand."

"You can't keep sleeping at the academy, Eret. This home can be yours, if you want it."

Did Hiccup actually expect him to stay? After everything that had happened, he wanted a dragon trader living among people who rode dragons? No sense! This kid made no sense whatsoever!

Hiccup regarded Eret, quietly, saw his confusion, his wariness and then his bafflement. "I know you haven't really said if you'll stay or not, and you are by no means obligated to, but..." Hiccup shrugged. "You are welcome here, for as long as you want."

Eret stared at him, saw that Hiccup meant every word. He turned towards the house, considered it.

He'd never really had a home of his own. His village had been raided when he was still just a youngling, too young to even remember his own parents. The tribe that had taken him kept him mostly on the boats, working as a cabin boy, cleaning fish, whatever, then eventually selling or trading him to another tribe. His bed had always been a mat in a dingy cabin on the boat, or in a hovel by the

docks of whatever village they were visiting. He had no family name, no honor; he had just been a slave.

Eventually he bartered passage on a trapper's vessel, which was where he learned about hunting dragons. They traveled the seas extensively and lent out their skills to random villages. When the Captain had been killed by a dragon attack, Eret, as his first mate, took up the mantle and finally began a life of his own.

He gained confidence in himself and his abilities; took on a new crew but turned to fishing instead of trapping, because he simply didn't want to spend the rest of his life hunting dragons, or waiting to be killed by one.

For many years they supplied some of the poorer villages with fish, in trade for milk, cheese and yard goods. Eret lived on that boat, while his crew would be dropped at their villages for a few weeks to spend with their families. The boat was the only home he'd ever known.

Then, three years ago, Draco made him an offer he couldn't refuse and he was forced to hunt dragons again. Now, here he was, being offered a home, a real life, in a real village with real neighbors and it was being offered by a young man whose father was killed by his former employer.

"Why?" he demanded. "Why are you doing this?"

"What do you mean?"

"I worked for Drago. Drago forced your dragon to kill your father, to almost kill you. Drago destroyed your village and would have obliterated your tribe if you hadn't stopped him."

Hiccup stared at him, grimly. "I know what happened. I was there."

"Then why?" Eret hadn't meant to yell, but he had to understand what was going on in this kid's head. "No one gives anything for nothing and by rights. Gods, by tradition you have every reason to kill me!" Not offer him a bleeding home and friends and family for Thor's sake!

Hiccup slowly slid off Toothless and moved to the edge of the cliff to look out over the sea. He folded his arms around himself and tried to think of an answer. Toothless moved to his side and whined, sensing the boy's distress.

"I...I'm sorry." Gods! As if this poor kid hadn't been through enough, now he's got some yak's ass yelling at him. "I didn't mean...I...look, I appreciate..."

"The first time I shot down a dragon," Hiccup began, quietly. "I was so proud because finally, finally. I had become what my father wanted me to be. I was gonna cut out the dragon's heart and take it to my father, and show him that I was a real Viking. That I wasn't the waste of space everyone thought I was."

Toothless nudged Hiccup, until his rider rubbed him and offered a small, sad smile. Hiccup had never told the full story to anyone, not



even Astrid, and he wasn't exactly sure why he was telling Eret, except, that he sensed Eret needed to hear it.

"But when I went to kill that dragon, I...couldn't." He thought about Astrid's words so long ago. "No. No, I wouldn't. And so, I cut him free." He turned back to Eret who had grown quiet. "That dragon had every right to kill me. We had killed hundreds, thousand of his kind, and I was a product of my upbringing, forced, perhaps not physically, but emotionally, to do something I knew was wrong."

Eret studied Hiccup and the reptile beside him. "Was it him?" he asked. "The dragon you shot down? A Night Fury?"

"Yes." Hiccup looked down at Toothless who stared at him adoringly. "But he didn't kill me. He gave me a second chance to be...To be someone I never knew I was capable of being." He lifted his eyes to the larger Viking. "I had to earn his trust and it wasn't easy. My stupid invention had badly injured him, but I knew that if he was going to give me a second chance, if he was going to reconsider his instincts and everything he knew, then the least I could do was change too. To try and...give him back the life he had, however way I could."

"His tail?"

Hiccup nodded as Toothless purred and licked him. "I didn't know, of course, that his life and mine would grow to depend so much on each other, or that that my life would change so much for the better, but it did. "He lifted his eyes again to Eret. "It all started with a second chance."

Eret felt an uncomfortable mist in his eyes and blinked rapidly. How old was this kid? His gaze moved from the young Chief's face, to the canvas tail, to Hiccup's metal leg, and he wondered exactly how much the two had been through together, and what it felt like to be that close to something, to someone; even if it was a dragon.

"I have...honestly, never met anyone like you before."

"Yeah." Hiccup sighed and smirked. "I get that a lot."

"I bet." Eret chuckled and looked back at the house. "So, you really mean it? You're giving this house to me?"

"Absolutely. It will give you space to get used to us and us to you, and at the same time you're still close enough to be part of the village." Hiccup waved his hand and moved away from the edge. "We'll actually be building more homes up here eventually, so you won't be alone for long, and you can fly Skullcrusher to and from the main village."

"Well, now. Feeding him is one thing, but I don't know much about riding them." He indicated Toothless. "Not like you ride him."

Toothless and I have been riding for a long time, and it just takes practice." And that gave him a really good idea, which he would file away for later. "We can teach you, and it won't be as hard as you think."

"Oh...okay, then."

Eret ran a hand over his hair and stepped over the threshold into Mildew's old house. There were gaps in the roof, and it was filthy, but no worse than some of the places he'd had to sleep before. And it would be his; an actual home, on land, with a roof, and a bed and furniture.

"Hiccup, I...I really...don't know what to say. I...I don't feel...I deserve this."

"Oh, you'll earn it, don't worry."

Eret stepped back out and raised an eyebrow at the young Chief.  
"Oh?"

"Sure. I intend to use your knowledge of trapping to help us outfit our riders and dragons to avoid getting caught in future."

"Well , there are still trappers out there, even with Drago gone." Eret nodded. "I guess I can give you a few tips."

Hiccup grinned, walked over and knocked lightly on the open door. "And, besides, Berk's new Captain of Defence needs a good, solid home to strategize and make plans, right?"

"C...Captain of..." Eret blinked rapidly in shock at the faith this fine, brave man was offering him. Finally, he found his voice. "I...I would be honoured to...to be that for you, Hiccup. Any...anyway I can help, I will."

"Good." Hiccup smiled, and then hopped back on Toothless. "Why don't you get started working on that?" He indicated the house. "I'll send up some people to help..."

"No! I...I mean." Eret looked at the house, affectionately, then back at Hiccup. "I'd prefer to...do it myself, if you don't mind."

"Okay." Hiccup nodded. "Oh, by the way, there is one other small thing you can do for me."

"Anything."

"My mother is flying some of the dragons to a new island. I'd like you to go with her."

Eret simply could not understand this young man. First he gives a complete stranger his father's dragon, then a house, then a distinguished rank among his own people and now he was trusting Eret with the safety of his own mother.

"Absolutely," he agreed and felt a strange sense of pride well inside of him. "When do we leave?"

"In a couple of days. I know she can take care of herself, but I just want to be sure..."

Eret nodded. "I'll bring her back safe and sound. My word on it."

"Fantastic." Hiccup grinned, pleased, then pulled Toothless into the air. "See you at dinner!"

"You bet!" Eret waved. "Chief," he added softly once they were out of range, because whether Hiccup believed it or not, he was a born leader.

## 10. Chapter 10

\_HTTYD not mine, blah, blah, blah. I seriously cannot stop writing this thing, so rather than make you wait I am just gonna update as often as I can and hopefully you will reward me with lots of reviews! :-)\_

\* \* \*

### ><p><strong>CHAPTER TEN<strong>

Towards the end of the day, dark clouds rolled in along the horizon and Hiccup knew that everything else would need to wait. He had canvas draped over the open, unfinished buildings as best could be done and directed that all tools be put away, especially anything metal. They had learned their lesson with metal and lightening a few years before.

It would be a heavy storm, based on the amount of clouds that were gathering, and Bucket was howling about the tightness of his head pale, so Hiccup figured they only a few hours to batten down the hatches. If it lasted through the day tomorrow, they'd be behind in their work, but one couldn't contend with Thor's need to vent, so they would have to figure out something to do inside.

And \_that\_ gave him a great idea.

He climbed aboard Toothless and flew through the village to the Hofferson's house. Astrid answered the door, and he realized that he had hardly seen her except for those few moments at the forge.

"There you are. Have you been hiding?"

"No, just crazy busy."

"Ah, well. I've been busy...pretty near the edge to crazy, but I'm hanging on so far, and that's probably only because I've managed to avoid the twins for most of the day."

She grinned, glanced behind her, then stepped outside, closed the door and grabbed him in for a quick kiss. "Miss me?"

He slid his arms around her and leaned his forehead on hers. "When I had time."

She rubbed his back, sympathetically. "It won't be like this forever, Hiccup."

"I know." He took a moment just to hold her, breathe in her scent. "Dad made this all look so easy."

"He was Chief a lot longer than you have been, don't forget."

"Yeah." He sighed. "Doesn't make me feel any better, sorry."

She chuckled. "Poor baby."

"Hmmm." With a heavy sigh he straightened and released her. "Is your uncle home?"

"Yeah, sure." She narrowed her eyes. "Why?"

"I wanted to ask him something."

"What?"

"Astrid, that's between your uncle and myself." When Astrid simply put one hand on her hip and blocked entry into the home he sighed. "You're not supposed to deny the Chief, you know."

"Hiccup, if this is about..." She flushed. "What is this about?"

"I love you," he replied and simply stared at her.

"I love you too, but..."

"I need to speak to your uncle..."

"Why can't you tell me first what it's about?"

"Why can't you let me speak to your uncle?"

"Hiccup!"

"Astrid!" He grinned, leaned in and kissed the tip of her nose. "You know why."

She was afraid of that. "You're going to discuss that now?"

"Seems as good a time as any."

"But..."

"You did agree, Astrid." He frowned. "Are you saying you want to wait now?"

The idea of waiting eight months no longer appealed to her, but there was no way they could do anything for at least a few weeks, so she didn't understand why he pushing to talk to Fin right away.

"No. I said yes, and I meant it, it's just..."

"Then let me speak to your uncle."

She growled in frustration. "Oh! Fine!"

She threw open the door and Hiccup noticed two other families settled in the living area; Astrid hadn't been kidding when she said she had a full house.

Astrid called out for her uncle and the older Viking poked his head down from upstairs. "Good Evening, Hiccup. What can I do for you?"

"How is everything, Mr. Hofferson? Do you have enough blankets and food for everyone?"

"Oh yes, it's a tight fit, but we're managing." He straightened and started down the stairs. "It was good of Astrid to give up her bed the last two nights."

His intent gaze told Hiccup that he was well aware where his niece had been sleeping, but he couldn't tell if the older man was upset by it.

"Yes, well...Could we speak outside for a moment, Sir?"

Fin nodded and moved to the door, gently pushing Astrid back into the house as they stepped outside. "Watch that chicken doesn't burn, dear."

Astrid shot Hiccup a worried look, even as the door closed on her.

"Let's take a walk," Fin suggested, knowing his niece would be listening at the door. "I think I know what this is about."

"Oh?"

"I know my girl has been staying with you." He met Hiccup's gaze. "And Gobber, and your mother, so there's no need to discuss it. I have full confidence you've behaved honourably."

"Thank you, Sir." Hiccup was relieved to hear it.

"You're Chief now. You shouldn't be calling me, sir. Fin is fine."

"I have a tremendous amount of respect for you, Mr. Hofferson. You were a good friend to my father, and you're older and far wiser than I am. Plus, I am marrying your niece. It would feel...wrong to be so informal."

Fin felt his chest swell with pride. Yes, very honourable indeed. "Well then." He wasn't sure what else he could say. "We'll be kin, soon enough. Maybe you could call me Frã|ndi, as Astrid does."

Hiccup felt a lump form in his throat. "I...I'd like that."

"That makes two of us." Fin set his hand on Hiccup's shoulder, marvelled at how much this young man had been forced to deal with and what a fine man he had grown into. "You are your father's son. You will do what is right for all of us."

"I...I hope so." Hiccup cleared his throat. "Um...anyway, I wanted to ask you...Well, I've spoken with Astrid already and she...You see everything is so..."

He realized his hands were trying to impress the words his mouth wouldn't and quickly pulled them behind his back, gripping one hand in the other to keep them there. Astrid was right; he did use them too much. Best just spit it out.

"I want to marry Astrid."

"I know, and we're all looking forward to Harvest..."

"Now, Sir." Hiccup swallowed. "Tomorrow. If you will give your blessing."

Fin's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Tomorrow?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Astrid hasn't completed her training, Hiccup. I...I'm still gathering her dowry and...Your father assured me I would be allowed time to..."

"I don't care about any of that." Hiccup raised his hands, peaceably when Fin's face reddened. "I...I mean. I mean, I don't mind that she doesn't know everything about...about..." He flushed and tried to make his mouth work. It had all sounded so much better in his head. "I love Astrid as she is, Sir. Just as she is. I know that there are traditions to be considered, and I'm not ignoring them, I'm just...I care about her more than I do them."

"I see." Fin said quietly. "But why the sudden rush?"

"Life is short and I want to spend my life, however long or short it is, with Astrid. All of it, every possible minute, and I know you would prefer we wait and I do understand why, but I just...can't."

Fin continued to regard him, silently.

Hiccup took another deep breath, wishing he could be more eloquent. "You can present the dowry whenever you're ready. We'll still have that ceremony in the spring, or whenever you like, and as for training, um... Gothi can still teach Astrid whatever Astrid feels she needs to learn. I...I just need to know she is..." He closed his eyes for a moment, his hands curled into fists, then released them as he tried to pull his thoughts back in order. "That she has my name, and...and the status of my..." He cleared his throat. "P...position and... and is protected...uh...by those...things." Another breath. "Now, not...not later, but now."

"As Chief you could claim her at any time."

"No." Hiccup shook his head. "Not without your blessing. I...I would never ignore that tradition. I would never force a decision on you just for my own satisfaction."

"But you just said you can't wait."

"I know..." He released a shaky breath of barely concealed frustration. "I'm probably not expressing myself well" He closed his eyes then opened them again and met Fin's directly. "Right

now...She's the only thing keeping me sane, Sir. She...fills something in me that I never knew I was missing until...until her."

Fin's heart went out to him. "Now, Hiccup..."

"I know!" Nerves and fear caused Hiccup to press forward and before he could stop it everything came tumbling out. "I know it's completely selfish on my part. I just... I never thought about Dad...Dad..." He still couldn't even say it. "I mean...he's a Viking, we're all...Vikings and it's part of the hazards, but he's always been there and he seemed so indestructible and... and in one day I...I lost him...and...I almost lost Toothless and I...I can't be certain about anything anymore, about anyone... and I keep thinking what if something happens to Astrid and she..."

Fin realized the boy was close to tears and stepped forward. "Breathe. Breathe, son."

"I'm sorry. I...I didn't mean to say all that, I'm...sorry." Hiccup took several deep breaths. "This...isn't going the way I...hoped it would."

This boy was going to make a damn fine Chief, Fin decided, once he let go of all that fear. "You've discussed this with Astrid? She is willing to marry you now?"

"Y...yes."

"So, I...I'm just trying to understand this. You need her there to support you, because of everything that's happened, is that it? You need a wife to run things so you can concentrate on being Chief?"

"No!"

"Hiccup, it's perfectly reasonable, I'm not saying otherwise, I just want to understand..."

Hiccup ran his hand through his hair. "No. I love her. That's it. I...I love her and I don't want to be...apart from her any more than I have to. I don't need her to run my home, I need her to be in my home, to be part of my home and...and be every piece of my life, for every single moment the fates will allow us."

"Well then." Fin had never heard a finer pledge for marriage, or a more unconventional one. "Of course you can get married tomorrow."

Hiccup stared at him, caught between disbelief and relief. "R...really?"

"Yes." Fin smirked. "Actually, you've had my blessing since you came to the door."

"What!" Hiccup bowed from the waist and braced his hands on his knees. "You couldn't have said that earlier?" he whimpered.

"I could have, but I had to be sure you were doing right by my niece." Fin laughed, slapped him on the back. "Are you going to be

alright?"

"Possibly. Maybe...I don't know. "Hiccup finally managed to get his breathing back under control and straightened. "That was really mean."

Fin chuckled. "Where do you think Astrid gets it?"

They walked back to the house and Fin tossed his arm around Hiccup's shoulders. "Astrid will have to sleep here until tomorrow," Fin said, firmly. "We have to observe the proprieties at least."

"Yes! Yes, of course, only...Would you and she have breakfast at my house tomorrow, so we can...well, so we can talk about...it?"

Fin raised his eyebrow. "You did say she knows about this, right?"

"She...agreed to marry sooner...I haven't really told her tomorrow is sooner...yet." He knew the less time he gave her to think about it the bigger chance he had of convincing her. "So...ah...If you could maybe not mention our discussion to her yet? She has agreed. but I only just decided on the time."

Fin's eyes widened. "You intend to surprise her with the news?" His niece hates surprises.

"Um...more or less."

"Do you intend to be wearing armor when you do?"

Hiccup laughed and was startled at how good it felt. When was the last time he actually laughed? "Full suit, yes sir."

Fin nodded and extended his hand. "Tomorrow it is then."

Hiccup shook the older Viking's hand, and then had to keep himself rooted to the ground to avoid jumping for joy. "See you tomorrow."

## 11. Chapter 11

\_Wow! Thanks for all the great reviews! I'm so relieved I am not overloading you with so much at once! LOL. It is so very much appreciated, really. Whew! Anyway, here is another little bit, leading up to the wedding. Now, I don't know a lot about Viking weddings, there isn't a lot I could find on them either, but HTTYD is not completely accurate or traditional as it is, so hopefully you will forgive and accept my spin on it, when I do post the wedding chapter.\_

\_Until then, please enjoy this paltry offering, and as always, review, review review! HAHA\_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER ELEVEN<strong>

Sheets of rain and booming thunder pounded the island of Berk. Most



of the villagers were huddled in their homes or in the great hall with the shutters tightly closed, chatting, or drinking and whiling away the hours until bed time.

A single form stood alone as the gloom of the storm outside was pushed back by the glowing fires of the forge where he worked. His chest was soaked and glistening from the heat, his dripping hair falling into his eyes as he worked, placing his face in shadow.

The Night Fury curled in the corner winced and whined at a crack of thunder and he looked at the thin black smith accusingly.

"Just a little while longer, bud," Hiccup assured as he carefully dipped the rounded object he was working on into the fires to soften the metal. "Almost done, I promise." He used a small hammer, barely the size of two of his fingers and rounded the metal further.

"Hiccup?"

Hiccup didn't turn, he just waved with his free hand as Fishlegs entered the forge. "What are you doing out in this weather?"

"Oh, Meatlug and I like storms, she likes to try and catch the rain drops."

Hiccup glanced at the sodden clothes of his friend. "Looks like you caught most of them."

Fishlegs chuckled and moved further inside to the warmth of the forge. "What are you doing out in it?" he countered, glancing at Toothless cowering in the corner. "Doesn't look like Toothless is enjoying it."

"No. I've told him to go home, but he won't."

Hiccup wasn't overly fond of the weather himself, thunder didn't bother him, or the rain, but after getting struck by lightning a few years ago, he was still a little skittish when out flying in it.

He used the tongs to dip the ring in the fires once more, then into the bucket of water, watched the steam rise with a smile of satisfaction. He pulled it out and dropped it into Fishleg's open palm.

"What do you think?"

Fishlegs inspected the small, thin silver ring. "It's beautiful. Hey! Is this...Gronkle Iron?"

Hiccup nodded. "I took a piece from my shield." He picked up the ring and held it to the light, looking for imperfections. "It sure does shine."

"Is it for Astrid?"

Hiccup nodded. "We're getting married."

Fishlegs smiled. "I know."

"Tomorrow."

"What!" Fishlegs gaped at him, and then threw his arms around Hiccup and lifted him off his feet, excited. "Oooh! Oooh! This is amazing!"

"Fish...legs!" Hiccup grunted, both his arms were trapped at his sides and he couldn't push away. "Down...put me...down!"

Fishlegs dropped him, giggling. "Sorry! Sorry." He patted Hiccup's chest, suddenly realized it was bare and pulled his hand back. "Um...sorry."

Hiccup tilted his head...awkward. "Yeah...okay." Why was he reminded of Dagur wanting to be his brother? "Um...so, anyway." He turned away and reached for his tunic.

"But how can everything be ready for tomorrow?" Fishlegs asked. "I mean, there's so much work to do and how are we going to feast for three days and nights and..."

"We're not."

Fishleg's eyes widened. "You have to! It's tradition and the Gods. .!"

"The feasting will be done in the evenings," Hiccup stated as he pulled on his tunic and slipped the ring into his pocket. "The day time will be spent on the village, because the Gods surely do not want any of us to have no shelter against the winter, now do they?"

"Well, no but..."

"And a hard day's work will give everyone a better reason to enjoy the feast in the evening. We'll have the exchange of dowry and gifts in the Spring, and will observe the proper rites for the Gods then, as we originally planned, but the ceremony will be tomorrow."

Fishlegs stared at him.

"What?" Hiccup demanded as doubts started to slip in again. "You think it's too soon too? You think I don't know what I'm doing and I'm going to call down the fury of Odin and Freya on the village? What?"

Fishleg's gaze softened and he put his hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "I think you guys will have an amazing marriage and life together."

Hiccup physically deflated. "T...thanks, Fishlegs. I...I guess I'm a little nervous."

"About getting married?"

"No." And he wasn't nervous about marrying Astrid. It was the one, the only thing he felt absolutely sure about. "I'm just worried how everyone will react, I guess. It's not traditional, and I'm not trying to upset anyone, especially not the Gods, but I..." He

shrugged. "I just don't want to wait."

"Well, first, you're Chief, so if anyone has any problem with your decisions they can write it on a piece of paper and stick it up Toothless' bum."

Toothless squeaked, offended at the idea.

"He doesn't mean it, Bud." Hiccup smirked. "That's not exactly a conventional forum for dispute, Fishlegs"

Fishlegs waved a dismissive hand. "Second, I think you and Astrid already have the blessing of the Gods. I mean, look at everything you two have been through together, and you're still here, you still love each other. That's got to be a sign from the Gods, right?"

"I...I never thought of it that way."

"And third..." Fishlegs released a girlish giggle and shuffled excitedly on his feet. "You're getting married to Astrid Hofferson!"

"I know!" Hiccup returned, just as animated, his friend's enthusiasm was contagious. "What in Thor am I thinking?"

"Well, she is always hitting you."

"That's okay, I kinda like it."

Fishlegs laughed. "Then you've got the right idea!"

"Will you be my witness, Fishlegs?"

"Me!" The heavier Viking's eyes misted. "R...really?"

"Well, you're my best friend, next to Toothless and Astrid. Toothless will be there, but he's a dragon and can't sign as witness, and Astrid is the bride so..." He shrugged. "I'd like to have a friend to stand with me."

"I'd love to!"

Hiccup stepped back and held out his hand when Fishlegs reached for him. "No."

Fishlegs could barely contain himself, he was practically vibrating. "Oooh...oohh! What can I do? Can I do something now? What can I do?"

"Well, since you and Meatlug don't mind the storm, why don't you go ask the cooks to get started planning the meal for tomorrow?"

"Oh! Can I help! I have some great recipes and..."

"Yeah!" Hiccup smiled. "Of course. Knock yourself out. I put it completely in your hands."

"Ooooooh!" Fishlegs clapped his hands, excited. "You have to let me...please? I'll be gentle, just once..."

Hiccup sighed. "Fine."

He winced as Fishleg's arms wrapped around him, but his friend didn't crush him this time and his feet remained firmly planted on the floor. He lifted his arms, which couldn't even begin to bridge the expanse of flesh on the larger Viking, and settled for patting Fishleg's shoulders.

"Okay. Good. Good. Let..go."

Fishlegs released him.

"Now, try to keep it quiet. Everyone else will find out tomorrow..."

"Find out what?" Ruffnut asked, followed by Tuffnut.

"Hiccup's getting married tomorrow!" Fishlegs slapped his hand over his mouth. "Oops!"

Hiccup groaned.

"Tomorrow?" Tuffnut grinned at him. "Dude! You're taking this whole power of the Chief thing to a new level!"

"Idiot!" Ruffnut punched her brother in the head. "The guy's still grieving and you're making jokes!"

"Ow! It wasn't a joke, I was just..."

"Actually, I'm okay..." Hiccup began quietly.

"Guys, please don't tell anyone!" Fishlegs pleaded. "It's supposed to be a secret!"

"Why is it supposed to be a secret?" Tuffnut asked and barely dodged his sister's second punch.

"They're gonna elope, dummy!"

Fishleg's eyes widened on Hiccup. "But what about the feast?"

Hiccup dropped down on his stool, and sighed, resigned. "Astrid and I are not eloping."

"See!" Tuffnut smacked his sister in the head. "I was right!"

"Then how can you be getting married?" Ruffnut demanded, shoving her hand into her brother's face.

"We're going to get married in the great hall, tomorrow, instead of next harvest." He lifted his hands when they opened their mouths to ask more questions. "I don't have all the answers, I'm still working this out, so please don't ask me any more questions. Astrid and I will be discussing it more in the morning, and then it will be officially announced tomorrow, but I would prefer if no one else knew about this until then."

Everyone stared at each other, slightly ashamed.

"Sorry, Dude."

"Yeah, sorry."

"I'm sorry too," Fishlegs muttered.

"Yeah, we just...y'know...thought you'd want to tell your friends," Ruffnut muttered.

"Yeah, your friends," her brother agreed.

Hiccup ran his hands over his face. "Okay. Okay, look. I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but I literally just talked to her uncle about it two hours ago, then I came here to make the ring and..."

"Oh! Oh you made her a ring!" Ruffnut pounced. "Can I see? Please can I see?"

Hiccup pulled the ring from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Ooohh, it's so pretty!" She ran her finger over the intricate designs along the interior of the band. "How did you do that? How did you get it so detailed?"

"Practice."

"Hey! That's an awesome ring!" Tuffnut agreed.

"Thanks." Hiccup took the ring back, before either of them dropped and lost it. "I need to head home and start making preparations."

"Can we help?" Ruffnut asked. "Hey, maybe we can decorate the hall for you?"

"Yeah!" Tuffnut agreed. "I am awesome at decorating!"

"Uh..." Hiccup glanced at Fishlegs, remembering Tuffnut's shark curtains, and the larger Viking just shrugged helplessly. "Um...okay. Okay, sure. You...But don't start it until the morning, or people might wonder..."

"Sure! Oh man this is great!" Ruffnut and Tuffnut high-fived each other and then paused. "Oh, what about Snotlout?"

"Yeah, he'll be hurt if we leave him out."

"I...guess." Hiccup tried to think what he could possibly ask Snotlout to do. "Although, he may not be as excited as you guys are..."

"I'm not."

Everyone turned to see the object of their discussion standing in the doorway of the forge.

Gods! Hiccup though, didn't any of them have the sense to stay out of the rain? "Uh...hey Snotlout."

Snotlout sauntered in, glared at the other riders, then turned his

attention to Hiccup. "So, what is it I'm not gonna be excited about, anyway?"

"Astrid and Hiccup are getting married," Fishlegs announced.

"Everyone already knows..."

"Tomorrow!" the twins insisted, eagerly.

Snotlout turned his gaze on Hiccup again. "Oh really?"

Hiccup nodded. "Yes. Really."

"I see." Snotlout crossed his arms over his well-developed chest. "And you're putting these morons in charge of it?"

"Hey!"

"Fishlegs wants to help with the food and...and the twins want to decorate the hall." Hiccup tilted his head at Snotlout. "Is there...anything you'd like to contribute?"

"Why? Seems you've got it all well in hand." Snotlout turned on his heel and stormed out. "Congratulations."

Hiccup rose and hurried after him, catching the stout Viking before he could climb back on Hookfang. "Snotlout, wait!"

"Why? You've got your \_friends\_ and your wedding to plan. You don't need me."

"You're...my friend, too." Hiccup reached for Snotlout's arm, realized he had never actually initiated contact with the brash Viking before. "Look, I...I hadn't intended to tell anyone until tomorrow. I'm still trying to figure things out, but then Fishlegs came into the forge while I was making Astrid's ring, and then the twins showed up and then...I wasn't trying to leave you out."

"They kinda butted in, hey?"

"Yeah...but...not in a bad way." Not really.

Snotlout looked down at the ground, then lifted his gaze to Hiccup's; he still wasn't thrilled that the kid who had been so small and scrawny was now taller than him. "So... you want me to...butt in...too?"

"I would, yeah. I mean, it wouldn't be the same without...without all of my friends helping me, right?"

Snotlout nodded and shuffled his feet.

"I'm getting married, Snotlout." Hiccup stared down at the ring in his hands and was suddenly struck by the enormity of it all. "I'm getting married."

Snotlout, after a long, awkward pause, placed a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "Then...let's make sure it's the best wedding ever."

Hiccup smiled in relief. "You'll help?"

"Well, yeah, you can't trust those dopes in there to do it right." Snotlout sniffed, adjusted his belt and cracked his neck. "Leave it to me."

"That...that would be great." Despite his faults, Snotlout understood tradition and culture and he had better taste than the twins when it came to decoration. Hiccup extended his hand. "Thank you."

They shook hands, then Snotlout stormed into the forge and started barking orders. "Alright you butt-heads. Fishlegs, get to the kitchens, tell them to start cooking chickens, at least sixty of them, and make a list of what food they need for a feast fit for Thor himself. Ruffnut, get busy on announcement notices. Tuffnut, scrounge the village, see what we can use for decorations." He pointed at the male twin. "No sharks."

Hiccup grinned at the scene of everyone hurrying off on their dragons as Snotlout turned to him.

"You. Get home and get some rest. You've got a big day tomorrow."

"Aye, sir!" Hiccup laughed, dosed the forge fires and climbed onto Toothless, who was more than ready to head home. "Thanks, Snotlout."

Hiccup arrived at his house, soaking wet, so they flew in through his window, then quickly closed the shutters. He shivered, set Astrid's ring on the crate by his bed, then pulled off his wet clothes and hung them to dry. He pulled on a spare tunic, one he hadn't worn in an age, but it was dry and comfortable, and a pair of woolen trousers, leaving his foot bare.

"Hiccup?"

"Yeah, Mom?" He lifted his head from where he was drying his metal leg as Valka's head appeared by the hatch.

"Where have you been?" she asked as she stepped into the loft with a plate of leftover stew.

"I was at the forge." He straightened and rubbed his hair with the towel.

Valka smirked, pulled the towel away so she could see him and tried not to laugh. His hair was absolutely everywhere! "You need to eat, son."

He nodded, took the plate, spooned up a bite, then set it on his desk. "I have to tell you something."

"Oh?" She watched, intrigued as he shuffled through the papers and cubbyholes of his desk. "Is it that you need a bigger desk?"

"What?" he turned back, then looked down at his desk and grinned. "Ha, no...well, maybe." He gathered most of the papers, shoved them in a drawer. "I'm just looking for...Ah." He picked up the contract

that his father and Fin had signed for their marriage. He would get Fin's signature on the amended document tomorrow, but for now, he needed his mother's. "Could you sign this, please?"

Valka accepted the document and the pencil, confused. "What is this?" She started to read. "Oh...I see. But, Hiccup, your father already signed..."

He pointed out the amended date. "Dad...isn't here to sign the change, so can you?"

Valka stared at him, shocked that he would ask. "I...I..."

Hiccup, who was now going through his trunk glanced at her. "I'm of age, but I still need the signature of a family member to witness."

She nodded and quickly signed her name. "It...it isn't that I don't want to, Hiccup, I just...I'm just surprised you would ask...me."

He scowled, puzzled. "You're my mother," he said simply, and as if that ended the discussion started rummaging again.

Valka sighed, baffled at how accepting he was of her, then she looked back at the contract and realized what the date had been changed to. "Hiccup! This is for tomorrow!"

"Yeah, I know." He pulled out a small box from the trunk and set it on his bed. "Astrid and her uncle are coming for breakfast so we can prepare." He opened the lid of the box and revealed dozens of tiny shells and several chunks of broken Geods.

"Where..." Valka reached a shaking hand towards the box. "Hiccup, where did you..."

"Dad gave it to me when I was...um...five I think." He picked up one of the rocks, which held a sparkling amethyst center, handed it to her. "He said they were yours."

She nodded, numbly as she fingered the precious stone. "Yes. Yes, I...I was always fond of these types of stones and...your father would bring them back from his trips for me." She picked up a smooth, cone shell. "These I started collecting when I found out I was pregnant with you. I don't know why, I just...I saw one in the sand the day I found out I was going to have a baby and I...I suppose I just let myself be led by superstition."

He smiled and sat next to her. "He brought them back for me too, whenever he went away," he admitted, picking up a piece of quartz. "I didn't know why until now, I just thought it was to give me something to look at."

Valka beamed at him. "I can't believe he kept them...that you kept them."

"Gobber said you used to make jewelry for the village."

She nodded. "Yes, a long time ago."

"Could you help me make something with these?" he asked her. "For



Astrid?"

She lifted shinning eyes to his. "Oh...Oh, I'd be honored, son." She started to pick through the pieces with a critical eye. "We'll need a quartz hammer, and some wire, a needle and thread..." She lifted her head again, cradled his cheek. "Oh. My baby is getting married."

Hiccup closed his eyes and leaned into her touch. "I'm really glad you're here, mom."

She beamed at him, then went back to the box. "Finish your supper."

"Yes, ma'am." He laughed and retrieved the dish of stew from his desk.

## 12. Chapter 12

\_HTTYD does not belong to long one, folks.  
><em>

\_Okay, so I had to change the rating to T, just because I don't want to offend anyone or get in trouble with the site by not rating it properly. There's a little steaminess/adult situations in this chapter, so I figured it would be better to change the rating. Hopefully the way I wrote it is still modest enough and doesn't take away from the story, and I put in plenty of Gobber Comic relief to balance it out.\_

\_And on that note...I am considering skipping the wedding/wedding night chapter for the same reason. I don't want this to become too much of a fluff piece, and I am not even sure any of you want to hear about their wedding night or if we should leave it to the imagination.\_

\_Anyway, let me know your thoughts and I will go from there. \_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CHAPTER TWELVE<strong>

Gobber snorted and woke from his pallet on the floor to the smell of something delicious cooking.

"Waz'it?" he inquired drowsily and sat up to see Hiccup setting a pan of freshly baked cornbread on the table.

"Breakfast." Hiccup said, as he sliced the bread, then wrapped it in a towel and set it aside. He opened the pantry to pull out a block of cheese. "How'd you sleep?"

Gobber sat up, yawned and stretched. "Fair. You look like you got some too."

Hiccup placed the chunks of cheese he just sliced on a plate and set it on the table. "I did." For the first time in almost a week he had slept a solid eight hours.

He stepped over to the fire to stir the porridge he had cooking there, added some berries and honey for flavour.

"Good." Gobber glanced up at the Night Fury, curious. "And what are you doin' up there, then?"

Toothless' eyes gleamed as he continued to stare at Gobber.

"Can you watch that doesn't burn?" Hiccup asked, indicating the porridge pot as he stepped around the Blacksmith and moved to the stairs. "I'll be right back."

"Aye, no worries." Gobber looked back up at the wriggling Night Fury. "Don't you even think about...Gah!"

Hiccup grinned as Toothless pounced on Gobber. He continued to climb the stairs to the loft, moved to his desk and shuffled through his papers and lists.

"What the...?" He moved the rest of the papers, spare parts for his leg and several books and frowned. "It has to be here." He crouched and looked under his bed, then his clothes cupboard, the trunk.

Feeling a mild panic rising inside of him, he searched the entire room and still could not find his portrait notebook. It was here yesterday morning, he'd been looking at the ones he had drawn of his father. He ran a hand through his hair. Maybe he had accidentally taken it to the forge with the others. Yes, that was probably it. He'd check right after breakfast, it had to be there.

He gathered the lists he had intended to use this morning and a spare pencil and started back down. "Gobber, did I leave any notebooks at the forge yesterday?"

"Not that I know of, Hiccup. Ack!" Gobber waved his hook at the Night Fury, who was currently in a tug of war with the blacksmith over the blanket he had been using. "Leggo, ya foolish beastie!"

"Toothless!" Hiccup insisted and the dragon immediately released his grip on the blanket.

Gobber, who had been pulling way too hard, tumbled over backwards into the wall. "Well, that's that then," he said, as he rose and folded the blanket. "Your dragon is a nuisance, Hiccup."

Toothless nudged Gobber, affectionately.

"G'way, don't try to make up now." But the blacksmith reached for a piece of cheese and tossed it to Toothless. "Away with ye."

Valka stepped out of the back bedroom and sniffed. "Oh my, something smells wonderful."

"Morning, Mom." Hiccup kissed her cheek on his way back to the fire. "Have you seen any of my notebooks?"

She smiled, pleased to be kissed, and ruffled his hair. "I see them everywhere!" Her son had paper and notebooks shoved all over the house, neatly of course.

"This one is a smaller than the others and has a picture of Toothless on it."

"No, I don't think I have seen it." She set some glasses and a pitcher of milk on the table. "Five is enough, right?"

"Yeah." Hiccup nodded. "Astrid and her uncle should be here soon."

She walked over, put her hands on his shoulder and leaned on him. "Are you nervous?" He had told her and Gobber last night about his plan to marry Astrid today.

"You know, I thought I would be, but I'm really not."

"You're in shock," Gobber insisted and settled his bulk at the table. "Marriage will do that to ye. You'll get the feelin' back in about a month or so, or so I've been told. Of course, by then it'll be too late, you'll be married."

Hiccup shot him a dry look. "I'm not in shock, Gobber."

"See? First stage, denial."

Valka laughed and straightened. "Stop teasing him, Gobber."

"There's still time, Hiccup. We can be about a hundred miles from here if we leave right now, and no one would be the wiser."

"She'd find me." Hiccup grinned and shook his head as he wrapped a towel around the pot of hot porridge to set it on the table. "There is no escape from an angry Astrid."

"Hiccup," Valka began, tentatively as she set the rest of the dishes on the table. "Would you like me to prepare your father's room for you and Astrid?"

"No."

"You're not gonna have your new bride sleep in the loft are ye?" Gobber asked, surprised.

"I like the loft and so does Astrid."

"Oh, but Hiccup..."

"We'll fix it up to suit us later, but for now, it's fine, Mom," He filled the cups with milk. "You can stay in Dad's...that room."

Valka stared at him, surprised.

She had wondered what the living arrangements would be once her son was married, but she hadn't expected him to ask her to live with them. It was tradition that a Viking family lived together once a marriage took place, which included the groom's family and the in-laws, but Hiccup had only ever lived with his father, so she didn't think he would want to include that tradition.

"What about your privacy, son?" she asked quietly. Their house was bigger than most, but it was still quite small for newlyweds and a hovering mother-in-law.

"I'll put a door on the loft." He walked past her, touched her shoulder. "I want you here, Mom, so will Astrid. It's fine."

A knock sounded at the door.

Gobber opened the door and grinned at Astrid and Fin. "Well, good morning!"

"It's raining," Astrid stated, grumpily. She hadn't slept worth a damn last night because of all the sounds in her house, but she could hardly defy her uncle when he insisted she stay home.

"It is." Gobber opened the door wider. "Come on in."

"Why do have to be here so early, in the rain?"

"We can't work outside." Hiccup leaned down and gave her a quick kiss. "So we have to make other plans."

"Hmmm." She dropped down on one of the chairs.

Her uncle had refused to tell her what he and Hiccup had discussed last night, but she assumed it was about them getting married sooner. That was fine, but she didn't see why they had to be up so early to plan something that would be weeks away yet. Of course, if he wanted to discuss today's agenda, that would be reasonable; but then why would her uncle be there?

"Good morning, Astrid."

"Morning, Valka," Astrid smiled. "This is my uncle, Finnegan Hofferson."

"Good to meet you, Mrs. Haddock."

"Just Valka, please."

Fin nodded to her as Hiccup served up a bowl of porridge and set it in front of him. "I didn't know you could cook, Hiccup."

He shrugged. "Dad always had such a busy schedule that it was just easier for me to do some things."

"I seem to remember that your father could cook quite well," Valka added.

"He could, but like I said, he was pretty busy." And it made him feel useful at something at least. Hiccup set a bowl of porridge in front of Astrid. "Milady."

She glanced down at it, had to admit that for porridge it smelled pretty damn amazing. "I guess you're gonna expect me to cook when we get married?"

"Expect?" he repeated as he set a bowl for his mother and Gobber on the table. "No. It would be nice, sure, but I wouldn't expect it,

Astrid."

Astrid sighed and looked at Valka as if to say \_'what do you do with a guy as sweet as that?\_' "Well, I guess you'll have to teach me, because the only thing I know how to cook is chicken."

"I like chicken." Hiccup sat down with his own bowl and suddenly remembered what his father had said to his mother. "Anyway, I'm not marrying you for your cooking."

Astrid blushed and Valka laughed. She spooned up some porridge and almost sighed as it melted in her mouth. "Wow! Okay, you can do the cooking," she said and eagerly took another bite. "Absolutely all of it."

Hiccup grinned and Fin chuckled.

"Now you've done it," Gobber said. "Second stage. Apron strings."

Before anyone could respond, Toothless wacked Gobber with his tail.

"So, what can we can get done today, Hiccup?" Astrid asked, shooting the blacksmith a confused look, before reaching for a piece of bread.

Hiccup glanced at Fin and slowly stirred his porridge. "Oh, I was thinking...maybe...a wedding?"

Astrid rolled her eyes. She knew it! "Fine! When do you want to do it? Three weeks? A month?"

"Today."

Astrid froze, then bolted out of her chair so fast all the blood rushed from her head to her feet and she almost blacked out. "What?" He couldn't be serious. He couldn't actually be thinking about them getting married today! "Are you insane?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"But there have been rumours," Gobber grinned.

I...you...!" She glanced at her Uncle, who was grinning at her. No! He couldn't have! Her uncle couldn't have agreed! "We can't do it today!"

"Why not?" Hiccup countered calmly. "We can't do any clearing or rebuilding in a storm."

"But..."

"And you agreed the next available opportunity..."

"Yes! But..."

"And this storm could last at least another day..."

"Excuse us!" She grabbed Hiccup by the shirt front and dragged him

towards the door.

"Astrid! Our food will get cold!"

"Better tighten that armor boy!" Fin called after them, laughing.

>Astrid yanked Hiccup outside in the howling wind and rain, the storm had gotten worse. "Hiccup, be reasonable..."<p>

"Reasonable!" He had to shout to be heard the howling wind and rain, the storm had gotten worse. "You think it's reasonable to stand out in this?" He lifted his hand indicating the chaos around them.

"We need to talk!"

"We can talk inside!"

"Hiccup, listen to me..."

He flinched as a bolt of lightning streaked across the sky. "Astrid, I swear if I get struck..."

She growled, understanding his fear, and pulled him over to the food shed. She threw open the door, shoved him in stepped after him. She lit a torch and set it back on the wall so they could see each other. They were both already drenched and she almost smiled at the sight, almost.

"There is no way we can get everything together in time for a wedding today!"

"The cooks have already started on the food..."

"What?...When...?"

"It was arranged last night." Hiccup shivered and rubbed his arms. "And we...we have someone to decorate the hall this afternoon." He took her hands, found them freezing, and quickly started to warm them with his own. "We have a bride and a groom, and your uncle's blessing and..."

"The Chief marries people, Hiccup!" she insisted, panicked. "How are you going to marry yourself?"

"I'm not marrying myself, I'm marrying you." He cupped one of her hands between both of his, brought it to his lips and blew warm air onto it. "Astrid, you're freezing. Let's go back inside."

She snatched her hand back, hating that she was enjoying it when she was trying to be angry with him. "Not until we settle this!"

He ran his hands through his wet hair. He'd checked with Gobber on that very fact last night. "In the event that the Chief is unavailable, an Elder can stand in, so Gothi or Grul can officiate with Gobber's help!" he snapped and then forced himself to calm down. He hadn't expected her to react like this. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He put his hand against her cheek, tenderly. "Astrid, I...I thought we agreed. You said it was okay to do this now."

"I know, but I...I thought you meant in a...a few weeks, a month!"

"What's the difference?"

Astrid frantically searched for a reason. "My dowry is only partially complete and..."

"I don't care about the dowry!" He gripped her arms. "We'll do that later. We can do all of that later, but I want to marry you today!"

"Hiccup! I..." She could see she was upsetting him, but when he made her promise to marry him now she hadn't thought he meant right now! "I...I don't even have a wedding dress!"

"Oh yes you do."

They both turned to see Valka standing in the doorway, her eyes shining with happiness. Cloud Jumper stood beside her, his giant wing sheltering her from the storm.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I had to...to help you both understand what's happening here."

"Mom..." Hiccup began, uneasily.

"Hiccup," she began turning to him. "You told me that Astrid's parents died long ago, and I'm sorry for it, but you have to understand how important and how scary something like this can be for a young woman, and without a mother to confide in and help you through it, well, it's ten times harder. You can't just throw this at her and expect her to be ready to jump at a moment's notice."

Hiccup blinked. "I...I know, but..." He lowered his head, ashamed for not considering Astrid's feelings more. "I just thought..." He turned to Astrid. "I didn't think...I didn't mean it, Astrid. I'm sorry."

Astrid offered him a watery smile. "I know."

Valka stepped forward and took Astrid's hand. "Astrid, Hiccup has suffered a lot of loss lately, a lot of changes and it's natural that he would want to have something solid to hang on to, something that doesn't change, like how you two feel about each other."

"I love him," Astrid insisted, her eyes going from Valka's to Hiccup's. "I do! That won't change!"

"He knows that, everyone can see that." She touched Astrid's cheek. "And because he knows that he wants you with him. It's a man's right to ask, and a woman's right to accept, but only if you're both ready." She smiled softly. "He just wants you with him and you want too, don't you?"

She nodded and bit hard on her quivering lower lip.

"I'm not your mother, Astrid, but I would love to be your mother-in-law. I've just found my son again and it would be such a blessing to have a daughter as well, but only if you're ready for

that."

Astrid felt a tear slip from her eye and Valka gently brushed it away.

"I know the idea of getting married can be frightening, and all the changes that comes with it, but Hiccup would never hurt you, or make you uncomfortable, or do anything that would make you doubt how he feels for you."

Astrid sniffed and nodded. "I know. I know that."

Hiccup stepped up and put his arm around Astrid's shoulder. "We can wait," he said, quietly. "I didn't mean to push you so hard. We'll just...wait."

"No." Astrid met his gaze and the overwhelming love that flowed from him. "I...we can do this. I promised, didn't I?"

"I won't hold you to that..."

"I'll hold me to that." She slipped her arms around him and buried her face in his neck. "I want this, Hiccup. I want you."

Hiccup closed his eyes as he held her, then opened them and stared at his mother, gratefully, mouthing a silent 'thank you' to her.

She nodded, pleased she could something for him. "Now, about the dress." She smiled at Astrid as Hiccup released her. "Hiccup told me your mother's things had been burned during one of the dragon attacks, including her wedding gown?"

Astrid nodded and accepted the handkerchief Hiccup offered her. "Yes. I was going to make one, but there hasn't been time."

"Well, I found my wedding gown still in a trunk in Stoick's room." She offered Hiccup a wistful look, then turned her attention back to the young girl beside her. "I would consider it a great honour if you would wear it for your wedding, Astrid."

Hiccup gaped at her, stunned. "Oh, Mom, really?" When she nodded he looked at Astrid, hopefully. "Astrid? It doesn't hurt to look...to try it on?"

"Oh...Hiccup, I..."

Astrid looked back at the woman who had given birth to the man she loved. There was such caution in her eyes, such a fear of rejection, even though she was smiling. And Hiccup, he was so earnest so...Gods, she could see the love he had for her all over his face.

"I...I guess I...I can try it on."

Valka clapped her hands together and stepped back under Cloud Jumper's wing. "Come along, he'll keep us dry to the house!"

The trio entered the house a moment later and Valka hurried into the back bedroom as Hiccup closed the door.

"So, what's the verdict then?" Fin asked. "Am I getting rid of you



today, girl or what?"

Astrid giggled, suddenly overflowing with excitement as she threw herself at him. "You're such a dork!" she laughed and kissed him. The she turned back to Hiccup again. "Are you absolutely sure about this? I mean, it's all happening so fast!"

He nodded. "That's the speed life seems to be going now, Astrid, we both have to catch up."

Valka stepped back into the living area with a shimmering gown of blue and gold.

"Oh!" Astrid tentatively lifted her hand to dress. "It...It's beautiful. What...what's it made of?"

"Silk, from Persia." Valka sighed and pulled the gown up in her arms, lovingly. "It was part of my dowry when I married Stoick, and it is part of your wedding gift from us."

"Oh, but I can't..."

"Of course you can!" Fin insisted. "Try it on for Thor's sake, girl. Stop fussing or someone might think you don't want to marry our fine young Chief, here."

Astrid looked at her uncle, and then at Hiccup, his expression was slowly turning to doubt.

She looked at Valka, and then focused on the most beautiful gown she had ever laid eyes on. "Try and stop me!"

Valka laughed, lifted the curtain that separated the main room from the master bedroom. "Let's see how it fits and if I need to adjust it."

They stepped in and the curtain dropped closed behind them.

Hiccup started to pace and on his second turn back he found Gobber grinning at him. "What?" Gobber continued to stare. "\_What\_?"

"Third stage...paranoia."

"Oh shut up."

"You sure you're ready for this, son?" Fin chuckled. "She's gonna be a handful, you know, especially you being so understanding about her...uh...lack of training."

"Aye, she'll get a swelled head, start riding your Night Fury there, and wearing your britches." Gobber warned, grinning. "Just you wait and see, you'll be cookin and cleanin' and she'll out be doing the Chiefing!"

"Yeah," Hiccup sighed. "Sounds pretty amazing."

"Odin's Beard." Gobber smacked his hand on the table. "He's gone straight to the final stage, delirium."

Fin spit out the milk he had just tried to swallow and howled with

laughter, as Hiccup looked at them, chagrinned.

After a few moments, Hiccup started to pace again.

"Nervous?"

He glared at Gobber. "No!" He wasn't nervous about marrying Astrid, he was just afraid he wouldn't make her happy. "She's just...She's Astrid."

Gobber and Fin exchanged a glance. Neither man needed more of an explanation. They both understood what a strong and amazing person Astrid was, and how much Hiccup adored her.

"Well," Gobber decided. "We all need something good to celebrate. There's been too much bad, lately."

"Aye, that there has." Fin nodded solemnly. "That there surely has."

"Does she like it?" Hiccup asked quickly, as Valka finally emerged from the bedroom. "Does it fit?"

"Yes. I'll have to take it up a little in length, but that won't take long."

Hiccup moved to the curtain and his mother's hand stopped him. "Is she still in it?"

Valka shook her head and said softly. "She's crying, Hiccup."

His face fell in dismay. "What? You said it fit..."

"No, son, she...that isn't why." She touched his face. "It's a lot to take in."

He held her gaze, then stepped inside and let the blanket fall back behind him.

Astrid was seated on Stoick's massive bed and wiping at her eyes with the handkerchief Hiccup had given her. She was in her usual outfit and the wedding dress was stretched across the mattress.

"Astrid." Hesitantly, he sat down on his father's bed, shook away the sudden sadness, and took her hand. "I'm sorry." He lifted her chin, caught her tears with his thumb. "We can wait. Oh, Astrid, I just love you so much, but we can wait."

"No." Astrid slid her arms around him. "I want to do it now. I want to be your wife more than anything, Hiccup." She pulled back enough to stare into his eyes, those fabulous green eyes of his. "I'm just afraid I won't...I won't be everything you need." She played shyly with the fabric of his suit. "That I'll disappoint you, somehow."

"Not possible." He caressed her hair. "You're already everything I need and you could never, ever disappoint me." He pressed his lips to hers in a soft kiss. "I love you." Another. "I love you, just you. It's only ever been you, Astrid."

"If that's true," she teased. "Shouldn't you try out some other girls fir...uummhh!"

Astrid's words and giggle were cut off as his mouth met hers a third time, with an eagerness and passion she hadn't known he possessed.

"No," he stated firmly as he pulled back. "No one else, for either of us."

Astrid stared at him, dazed. What was she saying? "Um..."

"Good comeback."

"I had one," she giggled and pressed her head to his chest. "But, I lost it."

"Mmmm." He brushed his hand over her hair. "I'm excited."

She glanced down at his lap, then back up at him. "So I see."

He groaned and flushed. "About the \_wedding\_!"

She sat up, laughed, and wiped at the tears that still clung to her cheeks, then suddenly punched him in the gut. "That's for freaking me out!"

Hiccup rubbed his stomach and grinned, even as she leaned in to kiss him again, softly, thoroughly. "And... that?" he croaked, overcome by the sudden lust she'd awakened.

"That's for choosing me." She stared into his eyes. "Out of all the other girls, you chose me."

Who else could he have possibly chosen? "A...actually well, you...you chose me...too, Astrid."

"I did, didn't I?" She spread her hands on his chest, underneath his leather breast plate so she could feel the warmth of his skin through his tunic. "I'm pretty smart to choose such a pretty boy."

He cleared his throat and rose before he forgot that they weren't yet married. "Let's...ahem...let's go...um...work out the details for this wedding...thing... then."

"Okay," she agreed, slid her hand into his and followed him back into the main room.

### 13. Chapter 13

\_Sorry for the wait, this was harder to write than I thought as it started to go in a dozen directions at once. Hopefully I've managed to converge it into a smooth flowing chapter that you will all enjoy. It's a little darker than the other chapters and there are some solutions Hiccup uses that I am not sure are even feasible, but it is fiction so I claim creative licence. (bites fingernails nervously) Thank you all for your wonderful reviews and suggestions, I hope you find this bit worthy.\_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER THIRTEEN<strong>

Astrid left Hiccup's house less than an hour later, just as the sun rose above the sea. He knew the next time he would see her would be when they were exchanging vows, as per tradition. Valka went with her future daughter-in-law to help prepare the bride, as Astrid did not have a female relative to assist her.

Hiccup headed up to the Great Hall to make the announcement to the villagers knowing most people would still be in the hall for breakfast. They took it better than he had feared, and only a few protested about the short notice. The rest seemed genuinely pleased with the news.

After that, he allowed the twins to start on whatever decorating they were going to do, while he, Gobber and Snotlout worked on the front area of the hall, preparing the marriage pedestal and setting up the monument of Var; polishing it to a shine.

"Dude!"

Hiccup turned toward Tuffnut who was holding up a stuffed Octopus. "For over the altar, yeah?"

"No." Hiccup and Snotlout said, simultaneously.

"Awww." The male twin slumped and walked away.

"That guy's taste is all in his mouth," Snotlout muttered.

Hiccup grinned. "He does make a really good yak-butter parfee, though."

Snotlout smirked as he hammered on his side of the pedestal.

"We can hang these from the ceiling!" Tuffnut suggested eagerly, returning a minute later, with something round and glowing dangling from his fingers.

"What is..." Snotlout began, then his eyes widened.

"Tuffnut!" Hiccup snapped as fear crawled into his belly. "Those better not be Changewing eggs!"

"Dude! I'm hurt that you would think I would do that!" He paused. "Because, I have thought of doing that, many times, so Kudos for knowing me so well, but I resisted!"

Fishlegs suddenly appeared. "Actually, Hiccup, they're rocks I pulled from that stream with the glowing algae that the Flightmare was following."

Hiccup paused in his work to examine the rocks. "That was three years ago, Fish- How are they still glowing?"

"Oh, I found that if you soak them in salt water they retain their glow."

"They are kinda cool," Snotlout admitted.

Hiccup nodded. "Yeah, okay then. You can hang them, Tuffnut."

"Awesome!" The twin hurried off.

"How goes it in the kitchens?" Hiccup asked Fishlegs.

"Well..." He wrung his hands, slightly. "There um...the chickens we had in storage are...um...kinda frozen still."

Hiccup slapped his hand to his face, remembering the spikes of ice still around the island. "The Alpha?"

Fishlegs nodded, sadly. "Yeah, the storage coop was a casualty. They won't be thawed for a few days, maybe weeks, but we have plenty of fish and eel."

Hiccup made a face. "Of course we do." He sighed. "What else do we have?"

"Oh, lots of bread and cheese, and a few vegetables, of course."

"For meat, Fishlegs," Snotlout snapped. "We can't just have fish at a wedding feast!"

"Um...well, there is some mutton and lamb chops, but that would be going into our winter stores."

"Fine!"

>"No," Hiccup countered quickly. "We can't deplete the village stores just for a celebration feast."<p>

"But...you're Chief!" Snotlout insisted. "And it's your \_wedding\_ feast, man."

Hiccup shook his head. "We're not touching the winter stores." He turned back to his work at the pedestal. "The fish and whatever will be fine, Fishlegs."

Snotlout and Fishlegs looked at each other, frustrated. They wanted their friend to have one really good day, out of all the crap ones he had had lately. Was that so wrong about that?

"Just a few chops, Hic..." Snotlout began.

"No. Dad already stocked the stores well, but if we get a bad winter we could be short of meat and we can't risk that for one meal." He rolled his eyes when his friends stared at him sourly.

"I...appreciate your help, but, Fishlegs, no lamb. If you can find anything else, great, but don't touch those in storage."

"Um..." Fishlegs began again, trying to think of what he could do. "We have lots of eggs and I have some great recipes for cake and tarts," he assured Hiccup, kindly. "I'll make a bunch of them."

Hiccup nodded. "Sure."

"I'll be back," Snotlout growled, dropped his hammer and walked away.

Fishlegs frowned as Snotlout stormed outside, then watched Hiccup's turn back to his work, effectively ending the discussion. Unsure what else he could say, he wandered off.

It was his own fault really, Hiccup realized, for pushing everything ahead so quickly right after a battle. Well, he couldn't do anything about it now. He only hoped that Astrid wouldn't be too disappointed. Gods, he hated eel.

Gobber, who had listened to the exchange quietly, stared at the groom-to-be with paternal concern. "Ye know, there'd be no shame if ye decided to just wed on the hill and have the feast later, Hiccup."

"Everyone expects it now." Hiccup finished hammering in his side and then moved around to finish the side Snotlout had been working on. "And you said it yourself, the people need something to celebrate."

"Aye." Gobber laid a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "But we're not a fussy lot, we Vikings. No one will care what's put out to eat, they'll be too busy singin' and gulpin' their mead, to worry what's goin' in their gobs."

Hiccup shrugged, then set his hands on the frame and he and Gobber pulled it upright. Well, at least one thing went right, he thought as he looked at the arch.

Suddenly, a horrific boom sounded around them, causing the hall to vibrate, and the ceiling burst into flames.

"Out!" Hiccup ordered. "Everyone out!" He grabbed a bucket of water and jumped on Toothless who flew out the door. They rose to the top of the hall and he threw the water at the flames. Gobber and Fishlegs joined him on their dragons with more buckets.

"How in Thor did that happen?" Gobber demanded and then spotted the Gungnir atop the Hall. "Who put that there?"

"It's the Sword of Odin," Tuffnut called from below. "I made it last night. Do you like it?"

Hiccup started to speak and was almost flung from the backwards of his dragon as another lightening strike hit the Gungnir, spooking Toothless and the other dragons. Flames grew once more.

"It's metal!" he cried. "You put metal on the roof in the middle of a thunderstorm?"

"It's okay, I had some lying..." Tuffnut realized the mistake as more flames spread along the roof. "Oh, right..Metal...Lightning...yeah. Sorry!"

Fishlegs and Gobber dove for more buckets, as the rain wasn't dousing the flames. Hiccup finally had Toothless blast the Gungnir off the roof to avoid another strike; no way he was going to touch

it.

"Hiccup!"

Hiccup looked down at Mulch. "What is it?"

"The storm's getting worse. It's ripped our coverings off the houses we were working on, and the ships are getting bashed up bad in the harbor. There'll be nothing left come morning."

Another Viking rushed up. "Chief! There's a rockslide on the north side of the village! People are trapped!"

"Gods!" Hiccup turned back in time to see part of the roof of the great hall cave in. "Really?" He groaned in distress, then turned Toothless away from it. "Ruffnut! Tuffnut! Get to the docks and try to secure the boats." He turned to Gobber. "You and Mulch find something to cover that hole in the roof."

"Aye," Gobber agreed and went to work.

"Fishlegs, find Snotlout, and meet me at that rockslide!"

Hiccup and Toothless zoomed off, as the other riders scrambled to obey. Toothless moaned uneasily. The rain was relentless and the wind was so harsh that both rider and dragon had trouble staying on a straight course.

They flew around to the north side of Berk and stared at the piles of rocks and mud that had buried a quarter of the village. He could hear people crying over the wretched sounds of the storm and spotted Eret among the men trying to dig people out. As they worked, chunks of loose rocks and dirt continued to crumble down from the cliff.

"We have to settle those rocks before another slide starts," Hiccup told Toothless as he looked around frantically, trying to see through the blinding wind. He spotted the Alpha's white husk, still lying at the cliff base where it had landed. "There!" He guided Toothless over and slipped off.

The tusk was at least a hundred feet across, long enough, but maybe not wide enough.

"Can you split it, bud?" he asked Toothless. "In half?"

Toothless walked the length of the tusk and shot a plasma blast at it every few feet until it cracked open. It was thick enough that it retained a connecting joint.

"Hiccup!" Fishlegs called as he and Meatlug landed.

"Where's Snotlout?"

"I couldn't find him!"

Hiccup swore. "Help me get this up to the cliff!" he ordered, grabbing some rope and wrapping it around one end while Fishlegs did the same at the other. "Call the other dragons, Toothless."

Toothless did so and a moment later the sky was full of flying creatures. Three more dragons joined the riders in lifting the enormous tusk back up to the cliff base, just as Astrid and Valka appeared on their dragons.

"What can we do?" Astrid cried, trying to calm her dragon in the wake of the storm.

"When we get this up there, have Stormfly anchor it!" he cried back. "Mom, there may be people hurt on the other side of the slide!"

Valka nodded, shook her staff and several of the dragons flew off with her and Cloud Jumper to begin rescuing villagers.

The tusk was shoved as hard as it could be against the cliff and Astrid directed Stormfly to shoot spikes beneath it.

"That will only hold for a little while, Hiccup!" she warned.

"I know!" He turned Toothless back towards a stack of ice that they had not cleared. "Plasma blast, Toothless!"

The Night Fury blasted the base of the ice, then caught one of the spears as it fell forward. They flew back to the cliff base as Gobber arrived on his dragon.

"Knock it through, Gobber!"

Toothless flew at breakneck speed towards the cliff, releasing the ice spear at the last second, so that the tip imbedded itself into the rock, then reacted to Hiccup's hard pull backwards so that they zoomed up the cliff face and back into the air with only about an inch to spare.

Gobber directed his dragon's hard, rounded tail to knock the ice further into the cliff. They did this twice more, until it appeared that the tusk would remain secure and the sliding mud and rocks pooled into the tusk.

"Fishlegs!" Hiccup called as the rider and Gronkle.

"I'm on it!" Fishlegs flew Meatlug close to the tusk and had the dragon release several lava bombs, which instantly sizzled and cooled from the rain, creating a heavy layer of crust against the open tusk and effectively stepping the flow.

Hiccup could see several dragons, led by his mother, carrying stranded Vikings back around the island.

He landed by Eret. "How many?" he demanded as he and Toothless started to dig.

"Nine, ten maybe," Eret said, his arms and chest were caked with the mud he was trying to work through. "It happened so fast, there was no time!"

"We'll get them out." Hiccup was determined to get them out or die trying.



Astrid and Fishlegs landed beside him, along with their dragons and everyone started picking through the rubble.

"There!" Astrid cried as she saw a hand poking through.

Eret, Hiccup and Gobber worked faster in that area, until they managed to pull out a young Viking girl, who was sobbing for her mother.

More villagers braved the rain to help, but it was slow going because the rocks had to be shifted carefully to avoid injuring anyone trapped inside. The dragons could not help as their claws might pierce a body, but they carried off the rocks that were tossed free, except for Toothless who was able to use his smaller paws and nose to nudge the heavier stones aside.

It took them hours to get through it all, but in the end they managed to get seven more out alive. One older woman, the last to be pulled out, did not survive and had succumbed to her injuries by the time they reached her. Her young baby had been in her arms when the rocks fell, he was also dead.

Those that were badly injured were immediately picked up by Valka and the dragons and flown to the hall where the Healer was tending to them.

"Hiccup!"

The young chief glanced up, exhausted as the twins landed on their Zippleback. The storm was finally starting to ease and the rain was more of a gentle mist now.

"We managed to save three of the boats, the rest were pretty much gone when we got there."

Hiccup nodded numbly. He was soaked with rain and sweat, his clothes covered in filth. His hands raw from digging and caked with a mixture of mud and blood that even the rain could not seem to cleanse him of.

"Hiccup!" Hookfang landed and Snotlout jumped off. "W...what in Thor happened?"

"Where were you?" Hiccup asked in a dangerously quiet voice. He couldn't get the vision of that baby out of his mind.

"I...I just had to...do something. I didn't...why didn't you have someone blow the trouble horn?"

"It's still packed in ice," Fishleggs reminded.

"Man, I'm sorry," Snotlout began and reached for Hiccup's arms. "I screwed up, I'm sorry, Hic..."

Hiccup wrenched his arm away, and everything, all the anger and despair from the past three days, the fear, the expectations, the doubt, all the disappointments and loss seemed to converge on him all at once.

"A woman and child are dead!" he screamed at Snotlout, shocking

everyone around him into silence. "Where were you? You should have been here! Why can't I ever count on you, you stupid, egotistical..."

"I'm sor..." Snotlout was stunned when Hiccup punched him in the face, hard enough to land him on his ass. "What the..." Snotlout wiped at his bleeding lip and stared up at the young Chief in shock. Fury rose inside of him and he leapt to his feet swinging, but Eret and Gobber caught him before he could strike.

"That's enough!" Gobber warned. "Everyone's upset right now and sayin' things they don't mean."

"Yeah?" Snotlout sneered and spat by Hiccup's feet. "Well I'm done being your errand boy, Hiccup, and that I do mean!" He shrugged the other men off, ran to Hookfang and took to the air.

Hiccup watched them go, then stared at the dirty, mortified faces around him. He lowered his head ashamed. He hadn't meant to do that, he hadn't meant...It was all too much, just too much...

"Hiccup."

He reluctantly lifted his gaze to Astrid, and noticed, for the first time, that her hair was out of its braid and clinging to her face, shoulders and back. There were flowers in her hair that had been pummelled and torn by the rain; her face, hands and arms filthy and...

"No," he whispered touching her gown with despair.

His mother's wedding gown was now caked in mud and dirty and torn in places from where she had been digging. He couldn't speak, couldn't utter a single word of how horrid he felt. He reached up to touch the damaged petals in her hair.

"I...I..."

What could he say? That he was sorry for pushing this wedding on her so quickly? Sorry for not considering that the weather might be a threat? Sorry for not reacting fast enough to the emergencies in the village, or for not checking that everything was secure before starting on wedding preparations? Sorry he hit Snotlout, his friend and teammate. Sorry, sorry, sorry, that he was a horrible Chief.

A woman died today, and a baby, just a baby, because he had been too caught up in doing what he wanted, and now...now his beautiful bride, who had already been upset over not being able to offer a dowry or having time to train in running a household, had lost the chance to even have a special dress at her own wedding.

"It's just a sheathe," she assured, seeing the horror in his eyes. She took his arm. "Hiccup, it's just my preparation gown." Astrid tried to pull him to her but he broke away, jumped on Toothless and flew into the air.

She started towards Stormfly, to go after Hiccup, but Valka caught her hand.

"You need to get inside and out of this weather," she insisted. "Go home and get cleaned up. We'll be needed to help with the injured in the hall."

Eret gently took Astrid's arm. "Come on, sweetheart. He needs some time alone."

Astrid kept her eyes on the Night Fury, until they disappeared around the island, then slowly climbed aboard her dragon.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>NOTE: Gungnir- A wide diamond shape with two swords striking through it in the form of an X<br>\*</p></strong>

\*\_The Norse Runeletter Gar, which symbolizes the legendary weapon of Odin, Gungnir.\_\*\*

## 14. Chapter 14

\_\*\*WARNING: Reading of the next two chapters may result in leakage from the eyes, sniffles and an incurred dependency on tissues\*\*\_. (I bawled as I was freaking writing it for Thor's sake) I wasn't deliberately trying to make it sad or angsty, it just kinda came out that way; and who am I to argue with the muses? \_

\_Anyway, hopefully most of you are not as sensitive as I am and can get through it unscathed. It isn't sad, sad just...well, you'll see.\_

\_Please, please let me know what you think by dropping me a quick review. Also, as this story will be wrapped up shortly, and Hiccup is still bouncing around in my head, I am taking requests for my next HTTYD story. :-)<br>><em>

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER FOURTEEN<strong>

The rain had stopped and the sky was ablaze with color as the sun began to lower over the horizon. Astrid finally had the chance to get away and search for Hiccup. It had been three hours since he had flown off.

She and Stormfly checked his house and the forge first, then the cove where she first met Toothless. Next was his lookout, where they both liked to go to watch the sunset, and then finally the secluded beach on the far end of the island, that she knew was his special private place.

On the way back from the beach, she spotted Toothless on the ground in the village, staring up at something. She directed Stormfly down and saw Hiccup hammering boards into the roof of one of the damaged houses.

"Hiccup!" Stormfly landed by Toothless and Astrid jumped off. "I've been looking everywhere for you."

Hiccup didn't look at her, he just continued to work and Astrid noticed he hadn't changed or cleaned up from earlier.

"Why are you doing that now?"

"It needs to be done." He pulled another nail from the pouch around his waist.

She looked around, saw that several of the other roofs had been repaired as well. Is this what he had been doing all this time? "Can you stop that and come down please?"

No, he couldn't stop, Hiccup thought, because this was what he needed to do, what he should be doing. What was expected of him. He glanced down at Toothless and signalled for another board. The Night Fury glanced at Astrid morosely, then picked up a board from the ground and tossed it up to his rider.

"Fine," she sighed and started to climb up the ladder he was on. "I'll come up."

"No!"

She paused, startled at the anger in his voice. "H...Hiccup."

"Go away, Astrid." He turned back and placed the board over the last gap. "I have work to do."

"No, I won't go away!" she snapped, frustrated. "We're getting married today, remember?"

"No, we're not."

His words were like a knife through her chest. "W...what?"

"I don't have time to marry you, Astrid. I don't have time to plan a wedding, or take care of a wife, so..." He stared at the hammer in his hand. "A Chief protects his own, and I...I haven't done that. You can't marry a man who fails at everything. Who lets his people die."

She watched him go back to his hammering, looked at Toothless and Stormfly, who stared back at her, concerned. In a sudden rage, she kicked out at the ladder.

Hiccup cried out as he lost his balance and dropped to the ground, but Toothless darted over to catch him before he actually hit. He slid off the dragon, shocked. "What...what is wrong with you?" he demanded. "Why did you do that?"

Astrid slapped him across the face, hard enough to knock his head back. "How dare you!"

He held his cheek and stared at her, stunned.

"Five years, Hiccup! Five years I've invested in you, in us, and now you want to shame me because you're feeling unworthy?"

He paled. "S...Shame you?"

"What else do you think will happen when I tell everyone we aren't getting married? My uncle accepted your bid of marriage! We have spent five years together, everyone...everyone knows we are together and now suddenly you don't want to marry me?"

"I...I never said..."

"Don't you think everyone will wonder why? That they'll wonder what's wrong with me that you won't honor our pledge?"

He shook his head, held out his hands, panicked. "Astrid, no! There is nothing wrong with you! You're perfect!"

His words eased her heartache. "Then why don't you want to marry me?"

"I do! But I..." He growled and turned away from her. "You don't...you can't understand. You...you said you don't want to be...shamed, but you will be, if... you marry me."

"Oh, Hiccup." Astrid felt some of her anger, her hurt fade into sorrow. "Do you think you're the only one hurting? The only one frustrated that everything keeps going so wrong? The only one who doubts Odin's plan for us?"

"We...we can't." He shook his head and kept his back to her. "The village...the death...destruction...we couldn't stop it. I couldn't..."

"Hiccup! You have done everything in your power to keep us safe, to help us rebuild and return to a normal life!"

"No, I..."

"You and Toothless protected us from Drago. You accepted the title of Chief to unite our people, even though you don't feel ready and are still grieving for your dad. You've started the process of rebuilding..."

"Rebuilding!" He spun around in distress and waved his arms around at the carnage surrounding them. "It's a mess! The stupid storm did more damage than Drago's Bewilder beast! How is this rebuilding?"

"It's a process, Hiccup, it takes time! Berk wasn't built in a day and it won't be rebuilt in one. We've been through this before, we've all been here before..."

"I know!" he screamed at her and pulled at his hair. "Alvin left the Whispering Deaths under our village, destroyed our homes and farms, because of me, Astrid! Lightning burned our homes because of my idea for metal dragon perches. Dagur attacked us regularly because of me! If I wasn't here Berk would be safe and we wouldn't be rebuilding every other month..."

"Absolutely," Astrid agreed, surprising him. "We'd be rebuilding every week."

He blinked.

"Hiccup, battling the dragons was the worst of all of it. We lost

homes, we lost people, we lost hope." She stepped up to him, caught his arms. "You changed that. You and Toothless showed everyone that our fate could be changed and that we could live with dragons instead of fighting them." She cradled his face between her hands. "We've thrived and prospered as a tribe and...We haven't lost any more people, since you changed things, Hiccup."

"We did today," he muttered bitterly. "My father would have saved them. My father..."

"Not even Stoick the Vast could predict the weather." She caressed his cheek, ran her fingers through his hair. "He understood things like this happened, things like this takes time..."

"They died! They died because I wasn't fast enough! Because...I was thinking about myself, about you and us, instead of them!"

"So...what?" Astrid demanded throwing her arms out, exasperated. "You think you should be punished for wanting a life? For wanting to be loved and to feel something good among all the rotten that's happened lately?"

He lowered his eyes and remained silent.

Astrid sighed. "You couldn't have known there would be a rockslide, Hiccup."

"Dad would have, he would have prepared for it! He would have..."

"No!" She caught his chin and lifted it so he would meet her gaze. The agony in those beautiful green eyes of his almost took her breath away and she softened her voice. "No, babe. Your dad was amazing, and the best Chief Berk ever had, but he wasn't Thor, or Odin. He couldn't be everywhere, every time, or be everything to everyone."

"He was. He was everything. He was..." Hiccup's control shattered.

The devastating grief that he had tried to ignore, tried so hard to bury, burst forth, and with it came the feelings of guilt, resentment and fear. He should have spent more time with his father. He should have tried harder to be the son his father wanted, to be a worthy successor, to be more of a Viking and less...a...a hiccup. He should have listened, really listened to the things his father tried to teach him, instead of chasing dragons and mapping destinations for places he wanted to fly away to.

"I...I didn't...know him..." He sobbed and dropped to his knees. "He...he was my...father and I...I...hardly k...knew him." He had lived with a father he barely knew, and now with a mother he knew even less.

"Oh, my love." Astrid knelt, pulled him against her and rocked him as his body shook with the guttural, heart wrenching sobs of one left behind.

Toothless, not understanding why his rider was so upset, nestled

against Hiccup's back, pressing as close as he could, and crooned gently to his friend. Stormfly did the same, against Astrid's back, so that the four were cocooned together.

Vikings were accustomed to death, it was accepted as part of their culture, their way of life, but that didn't mean they didn't feel the very real sorrow that came with the loss of a loved one. Perhaps they didn't always show it as openly as others, but someone like Hiccup, who had such a soft heart and was already so much in doubt of his own identity, his own abilities, needed to show it, to feel it. Instead, he had denied himself that need, until it threatened to break him.

Hiccup hadn't allowed himself the time to grieve properly, to acknowledge his loss the way every survivor must. They hadn't even had a proper funeral for Stoick, no feast to celebrate his life, to honor him and properly say goodbye; there hadn't been time. Hiccup had returned, defeated Drago and went right into being Chief; taking on the tasks of rebuilding the village and seeing to his people. No one had given him a day, a moment, to adjust to all the sudden changes in his life, or the horrible loss.

It seemed that the worst of Hiccup's grief now stemmed from the fact that he had never had a close relationship with his father. He had never felt good enough, brave enough to really talk to his father, but he couldn't see that Stoick was just as much to blame for the distance between them, perhaps more so.

"Your dad loved you," she whispered as she held and caressed him. "He was so, so proud of you, babe. He was a great man, but so are you. Oh, Hiccup, please, please believe me, so are you." She felt his arms tighten on her in desperation and, despite not wanting to dishonor the dead, continued. "He wasn't the one that beat the red dragon and saved everyone," Hiccup.

Hiccup pulled back, wiped at his face. "He...he wouldn't have gone to that stupid island if I hadn't...If I had just left on Toothless and..."

"And what? Never been seen again?" She cradled his cheek. "You'd have left me here and never let me see you again?"

"Oh come on." He turned his head, away from her touch, and laid his hand on Toothless' head as the Night Fury pulled curled closer to him. "You didn't even like me, Astrid. No one would have missed me."

Astrid felt a cramping in her stomach as the truth of his words settled. She had forgotten the years when she had disliked him, forgotten when she believed him to be a useless coward and a completely unsuitable heir to the Hooligan tribe.

Hiccup was an expert at deception and concealment, and he had convinced everyone that their words never touched him, that their actions had never hurt him, either by remaining silent, or hiding behind sarcasm and self-depreciation. And so the abuse continued, until the day he tamed a dragon, the day everything changed. Obviously their words had hurt him, had in fact wounded him and he had never forgotten, he hadn't forgotten a thing. How could everyone else have? How could she?

Tears pricked her eyes. "I'm so, so sorry, Hiccup."

"Why?" He shook his head and slumped back against Toothless' stomach with his peg leg bent under him and the other raised to brace his arm. "I was what everyone said I was." He shrugged and stared out at the horizon instead of meeting her gaze. "A useless, bumbling idiot. I was no Viking."

She stared at him. How could he say that? He had matured a lot in recent years, so very much in fact that it was rare for her to even see a glimpse of the shy, introverted boy he once was. It angered her that he had fallen back into the habit of blaming himself, finding fault with himself, as so many others found fault in him for so many years; her included. Then her anger turned inward for not knowing it was coming.

"That...that isn't who you are now."

Finally, he met her gaze. "I don't know who I am, Astrid." He picked up a rock turned it between his fingers and looked back to the horizon. "I thought...I thought my Mom...when she said, what she said when Dad died. It gave me, I don't know, hope I guess, that I could be something better, but I...I just can't be."

"Why can't you be?"

"Because I just...I just want to go, to fly away and...never come back."

The cramp in Astrid's stomach grew.

"Why?" she asked, quietly.

"I've made such a mess." He waved his hand helplessly. "People are hurt...some...two died. We're down to only three ships because I forgot to have them secured. I gave Tuffnut free licence with the Great Hall and now there's a huge hole in the roof and...I hit a good friend out of anger and hate." He released an unsteady breath, lifted glistening eyes to her. "I've never hit anyone in my life, Astrid. Not...not like that, but I didn't mean it!" His voice broke and he dipped his head ashamed. "Oh Gods, I didn't mean it."

Astrid was having a difficult time holding back her own tears. It tore at her to see him so crushed and broken. "So tell him." She placed her hand atop his bowed head, gently played with his hair. "Let's go find Snotlout and tell him you're sorry."

He shook his head. "He hates me. He's could only ever barely stand me to begin with, but now. Now I've ruined even that."

"You don't know that, Hiccup."

"I hurt you."

She stared at him.

"I didn't mean that either." He lifted red rimmed eyes to hers. "I do want to marry you. I love you, Astrid. I...I'm sorry for what I said, I just..."



She put her fingers to his lips. "It's been a day full of yak dung," she agreed. "But it's not over, babe. There's still time." She caught his chin when he started to avert his eyes again. "We can still get married, if you want to?"

"How?" he groaned and hung his head again. "The hall is a mess, people are injured, we...we don't have enough food and...No one would agree. No one want to celebrate with us after...after..."

"You have me," she said softly. "And I have you. We don't need anything else." She rose, pulled him up with her and looked at the state of his clothes. "Well, except maybe a bath."

A chuckle broke through before he could stop it and he looked down at himself. "I am a mess."

"You are, and I'm certainly not taking you to our marriage bed looking like that!"

He flushed and felt some of the horrible pressure around his heart ease, but then he remembered that poor dead boy and his mother. "No. Astrid, we...can't."

"Why?" she asked, frustrated.

He opened his mouth a few times to speak and couldn't find the words. Didn't she understand that the people of Berk would be in no mood to celebrate a wedding, especially his wedding? He had let two of them die. He had been preoccupied by his own selfish needs instead of seeing to their needs and the needs of the village.

"A...wedding should be blessed by...by the Gods and by the tribe. They would never do that now..."

She caught his hand. "Come back me."

He pulled back and she changed tactics.

"Hiccup! You are Chief, and if you feel that you've failed your people and caused them distress and harm it's your duty to face up to that."

He stared at her wide eyed. "Astrid..."

"Well? Are you Chief or not?"

"I...yes, but..."

She climbed aboard Stormfly. "Then come back to the hall and face the music. It's the least you can do," she reminded when he still hesitated. "After you've made such a mess of things."

The look on his face almost killed her. She didn't mean a word of it, but she had to show him that things weren't as bad as he thought.

"Your father would have at least apologized."

That did it, she saw the flash of hurt, and anger, and then grim

determination.

"Fine. If only to prove to you, once and for all, that you're better off with someone else."

She shrugged. "Fine." Not a chance in hell she'd ever believe that, she thought as Stormfly flew up into the air. "Prove it to me."

Hiccup climbed aboard Toothless and followed.

## 15. Chapter 15

\_I know I am spending a lot of time on the prelude to the wedding and I will probably spend a few chapters on the wedding/wedding night as well, so fair warning. Once I started writing it I got excited, and I know some of you would rather I leap forward a few days or weeks, but I'm simply having too much fun writing the details!\_

\_So, hope you are enjoying my take on Hiccup and Astrid's trials, and that you will stay tuned to the end.\_

\* \* \*

### <p><strong>CHAPTER FIFTEEN<strong>

They arrived at the Hall just as darkness crept in around them. Hiccup slid off Toothless, patted his dragon. "Stay close, Bud." In case he had to escape an angry mob.

Astrid climbed the stairs and stood in the doorway, her hand on her hip. "Coming?"

Reluctantly, he and Toothless climbed to the top. Astrid was right, he did have to face them. He owed them that at least.

She stepped inside and he slowly followed.

He noticed, almost immediately, that the hole over the roof was patched; not well, but enough to keep any further rain out should the storm return. Torches and lanterns were lit around the hall, and almost the entire village were milling about and chatting. He found some relief to see that some of them were even talking to Eret; who had been the first to help at the rock slide.

There were several people on pallets by the far wall, probably those injured in the slide, and their family members sat beside them. Hiccup felt his chest tighten painfully with guilt.

The hall grew stone quiet as he moved forward, his hand tightened on Toothless' back, instinctively wanting to flee. Instead, he continued walking as they parted for him, and he wondered if this was what it felt like to walking to your own execution.

When someone laid a hand on his arm, he flinched and looked up into Gobber's familiar face. "About time ye got here. We were worried."

Hiccup blinked, then continued moving forward. The support of

Toothless behind him was the only thing that kept him from being knocked backwards, when a little red-headed girl in pigtail braids ran up and threw her arms around his waist. He looked down at her, startled.

"Thank you, Chief," she said as she hugged him hard and tilted her dirty face up at him.

Hiccup realized she was the first one they had pulled from the rock slide. "I..." His surprise rolled into shock when a young Viking woman and her husband also stepped forward, and enveloped him between them.

"May the Gods bless you," the man whispered, emotionally. "For saving our Frieda."

Hiccup couldn't respond, didn't know how to respond. Why were they thanking him? Didn't they remember the ones he didn't save? Didn't they know about the destruction he didn't prevent?

They stepped back and, because he was still speechless and confused, he continued towards the front of the hall, toward his father...towards the Chief's table. Several other people reached for him as he passed, touching his shoulder, catching and squeezing his hand and Hiccup simply didn't know what to say or do about it all.

He stepped up onto the small platform that housed the table, separating it from the rest of the hall, and his mother wound her arms around him.

"We were worried," she whispered. "Are you okay?"

He nodded, pulled back and looked at her, dazed. "I...I don't understand," he whispered. "They..." He glanced at the people now crowded in the center, beaming at him. "They're not angry."

"Why would they be?"

"Because I...I didn't... two people died."

"Yes," she admitted and caressed his cheek. "And twenty eight people survived, including the seven who you helped pull from the rockslide." She smiled at him, lovingly. "And not including the twelve that were in here when the roof caught fire, who you also quickly evacuated."

"I...I..." He hadn't realized, hadn't even considered those who had been saved.

"Chief."

He turned and looked down at a tall Viking, whom he didn't recognize.

"The sun has set." The man held two bows in his hands. He held one up to Hiccup. "Will you...Will you help me send my wife and child to Valhalla?"

Hiccup released a shuttering breath, looked up into the crowd and saw

that everyone else had picked up their bows and arrows as well. Twilight was upon them and it was the time for a Viking Funeral. He could see no hatred in the man's eyes, no anger or accusation, only sorrow.

"What is your name?"

"I am Gunnar," he said and even the tell-tale shimmer in his eyes did not distract from the pride in his voice. "Husband of Hilde. Father of Rolf."

Hiccup reverently accepted the bow, then held out his free hand. "I am Hiccup, son of Stoick and Valka." He saw the surprise and hesitation in the other man's eyes, then gratitude as their hands met. "And it would be my honor."

Gunnar's breath hitched for a fraction of a second before his chest swelled.

Hiccup glanced at his mother, witnessed the pride in her eyes, and then stepped down.

Once again the crowd parted for him, and as he reached the door, he saw Astrid, Fishlegs and the twins waiting with their bows. He reached for Astrid's hand, squeezed, and then stepped from the hall.

The procession walked down to the harbor, with Hiccup and Toothless leading. A series of small pyres had been lit along the edge of the water, and a larger pyre had been lit atop a raised platform.

Gunnar stepped aboard the platform, as did Hiccup, though he stood behind the older Viking.

"May the Valkeries welcome you," Hiccup began quietly, remembering the words Gobber had spoken just a few short days ago, as men and women formed a long line along both sides of the platform. "May they sing your names with love and fury, so that we might hear it rising from the depths of Valhalla and know that you now stand as Shield Maiden to the Goddess Fryea."

Hiccup placed his hand on Gunnar's shoulder. "May your son reside at the side of Odin, forever young, forever pure, until the day we all may honor him, by joining him in Valhalla."

Gunnar blinked rapidly in gratitude, nocked his arrow to the flame as the boat with his wife and child slid out to sea and let loose. The flaming arrow landed dead center of the forms lying inside.

Hiccup lit his arrow, fired and it landed directly beside Gunnar's. The other Vikings followed with their arrows, and for one amazingly brief moment the sky was ablaze with the flames flying towards the funeral ship, carrying the respect and sadness of every Viking present. Then, the boat with mother and child, was engulfed and on its way to the other side.

After a long moment of silent contemplation, Gunnar turned, held out his hand again to Hiccup. "Thank you."

"I'm sorry," Hiccup said, softly "I couldn't save them."

Gunnar shook his head. "It was the will of Odin that they be with Him." He wiped at the single tear that slipped out. "And none of us, not even a Chief, can argue with the Allfather."

"No." Hiccup nodded and felt a little more of that pressure, that guilt ease from around his heart. "I guess we can't."

"She would have liked to dance at your wedding, Chief." Gunnar sighed, wistfully, as he squeezed Hiccup's hand before releasing it. "So I shall dance enough for them both."

Hiccup could only stare as Gunnar dropped down from the platform, was immediately surrounded by his, who put their arms around him, and walked back towards the village.

"So...About that bath?"

Hiccup looked down at Astrid, standing by the platform and staring up at him. He stepped down, folded her in his arms. "I do love you."

"Prove it." She kissed him, pulled back. "Marry me. Now."

He glanced around, saw that his friends had encircled them and were grinning encouragingly. He didn't know how they would manage it, but he would marry her, tonight in front of his friends and family, and a village who...seemed to have forgiven him for not being Stoick.

He nodded.

"Alright you, come with us." Gobber placed his hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "Ye canna be wed lookin' like ye were wrestling with a Gronkle."

"But, Gobber," Hiccup teased. "You don't believe in bathing."

"Aye, but I'll forgive it, just this once, on account of that pretty lass would kick my hind end all the way to Valhalla, if I let you marry her lookin' as you do."

"You'd better believe it," Astrid agreed waving her fist at him.

Hiccup started to smile, then spotted Snotlout, who was standing away from the others, staring at his bow instead of them. "Just a minute." He moved past them and walked to his cousin.

"Snotlout. I...I'm sorry for what I said. What I did."

Snotlout continued to stare mutinously at the weapon in his hand.

"I was wrong. I was tired and upset, and...and freaking out, really, and...I took it out on you. I'm sorry. I am really, really sorry. You...you can hit me back, if you want?"

Snotlout lifted his eyes briefly, as if the thought appealed to him, then he looked away again.

"Please? I...I want us to be friends again. You are my friend, you

always have been and...and more importantly you're...I need your help to do this. To be the Chief I have to be." He reached a tentative hand forward then pulled back. "I suck, okay? I...I'm a horrible..ah.. rotten, selfish person and I...pale in the light of your greatness."

Snotlout smirked and tilted his head. "Well...that's true."

"Will you accept my apology?" Hiccup held out his hand. "Will you stand with me again?" When Snotlout still hesitated he pressed forward. "If you say no, who's going to tell me I'm wrong all the time? Who's going to run off half cocked, and get himself in trouble, so I can learn to think faster on my feet? Who..."

"Okay!" Snotlout huffed and put his hand into Hiccup's, squeezing it much harder than was necessary. "Fine, I accept your...lame apology."

"Thank you." Hiccup winced and pulled his hand back, tried to massage the feeling back into it. "I think."

Snotlout poked Hiccup's chest. "You do need me, you know." Hiccup nodded, rubbed his chest and controlled the urge to roll his eyes. "I...guess I could have told you where I was going."

"It would have helped," Hiccup began then lifted his hands, peaceably when Snotlout's nostril's flared. "But, you know...it...it's done. Ah...it's...we both...um... No one could have predicted what happened so...so..." It struck him that Astrid had said exactly the same thing to him, and he had not believed her. God, he was an idiot. "It's all over and done now. Right?"

"Well..." Snotlout looked down at his hand, curled it into a fist. "I do still kinda wanna hit you back."

Astrid moved forward, immediately ready to defend Hiccup, but he waved her back and stood his ground. "O...okay." He lifted his chin, closed his eyes, but after a few seconds, the punch never came. He opened one eye, cautiously.

"Maybe, later." Snotlout straightened his fingers again. "So, I guess I have to come to this wedding thing now?"

Hiccup almost fainted with relief. "I...I'd like to have you there, sure, but no...no pressure."

Snotlout straightened his shoulders and cracked his neck. "Yeah, well...Someone has to keep those guys in line," he said shoving a thumb towards the other riders. "Can't have them embarrassing the new Chief and all."

"No." Hiccup smirked. "No we can't. That...that would be bad. Very, very bad." And he already took the prize in embarrassing himself regularly as it was.

They all flew back to the hall on their dragons and Hiccup moved again to the front, with Astrid at his side. He waited until he had everyone's attention, then spoke.

"Today has been...a tragedy. People were hurt." His eyes landed on a

man in the crowd who was supported by two others, because of his injured leg. "Some were lost. And we will support them, remember them." His eyes turned to Gunnar. "Honor them."

Gunner nodded at him, sniffed.

"Today...Today has been a blow to all of us, and to our...to my confidence to be your Chief. I'm still..." He paused and shook his head as he tried to gather his thoughts. A Chief wasn't supposed to show weakness, and yet, how could he lie to them? How could he be anything but honest with people who were depending on him?

He felt Astrid squeeze his hand, encouragingly, and continued.

"I'm going to make mistakes, have...already made some, and I can only ask that you forgive me for them and be patient while I...adjust to this new role." His eyes flickered over them, nervously and he wet his lips. "Today was supposed to be my wedding day, and I was to marry this incredible woman beside me." He looked down at her, smiled, then turned back to the crowd. "Despite recent events and my...un-Chief-like behavior, she still wants to marry me, and so I ask..." He looked at her again. "\_We\_ ask that you allow us to share our devotion, our love with all of you, and to be witnesses to our marriage, this evening, under the stars with..." He swallowed hard, pressed on. "With all the Gods, and...and great Chiefs watching."

When no one spoke after several minutes, Hiccup worried that they would deny his request, but then, suddenly Mulch spoke. "Helga, get to the kitchens and stoke the fires!"

Someone else cried out, insisting that the ale be stocked, and before long everyone was excitedly moving off to take on a task to help prepare for the wedding of their Chief.

Hiccup watched them, stupefied then was startled when a soft hand covered his eyes.

"Hey!"

"You're not supposed to see the bride yet!" Valka whispered, laughingly in his ear. "Come along, Astrid."

His mother's hand was replaced by a larger, more calloused one and Hiccup could do nothing but grin as he heard the sound of giggling and scurrying feet. Finally, Gobber removed his hand and Tuffnut was directly in front of him.

"Hey, Dude," the male twin grinned. "You're getting married."

Hiccup felt the rest of the weight he had been carrying lift. "I am," he agreed with a sense of wonder. "I really am."

"Bath, remember?" Fishlegs reminded as Hiccup stepped down off the platform, and Gobber physically shuddered. "I'll go get it ready."

Hiccup watched his friend hop on Meatlug and fly off, as Tuffnut, Gobber and Snotlout walked beside him towards the door. He turned to the wall where the injured lay, and crouched down next to a woman who

had a bandage on her head and a wrapped right hand. Two young children sat at her feet, and her left hand was gripping Eret's, who was propped, half lying, half sitting, on her other side.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, surprised when she smiled at him.

"Alive. Thanks to you."

"Everyone helped," he assured and lifted his eyes to the former dragon trader across from him.

She nodded and turned back to Eret, pulled his hand down to her cheek. "I know."

"Serves me right for not minding my own business." Eret smirked, shrugged and a dusting of pink rose in his cheeks. "People get attached, apparently."

Hiccup smiled, and then to the woman asked. "Do you have a place we can take you to rest, or was your home one of the damaged?"

She nodded. "Our...our home is fine, but I..." She lowered her eyes, bit her lip, then lifted her gaze to Hiccup's again. "I'd like to stay, for your wedding."

"Aye!" said the injured man behind Eret, as he lifted his hand. "Me too!"

Several other injured Vikings and their families nodded in agreement, also wanting to be part of the celebration.

"Okay." Hiccup rose and met the gaze of each and every one of them, his heart filled with pride and astonishment. "Okay." He turned to Sven who was tending to one of them. "Have beds brought in," he requested. "Set them up at the front, on the platform so they can see everything."

"But, that's the Chief's table..."

"Not anymore." He smiled down at the kids beside the injured woman. "Now it's a place for honored guests."

Sven blinked in shock, even as the others all smiled at each other, excited.

Hiccup turned to Snotlout. "Can you assemble some people to rig a sling for them to be carried to the look out?"

"On it," he assured and headed out.

"Hiccup," Tuffnut began.

"I know, bath." He grinned, stepped outside, and he and Tuffnut climbed aboard Toothless, followed by Gobber on his dragon. "Home boy."



\_Almost there! The wedding chapter will be next and I hope you all find it worth the wait. For now, here is the last preparation for the wedding. If you are enjoying the story, please review. A few have pointed out that the Great Hall could not have caught fire, I confess I never paid that much attention to it when watching the movies, to see it was actually built into the mountain, as I was focused on the story, but I do appologize for that error.\_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER SIXTEEN.<strong>

"Are ye done in there yet, boy?" Gobber growled, peeking through the curtain to the master bedroom, where Hiccup was sitting in a bath of soapy water, nicely warmed by Night Fury heat.

"Almost!" Hiccup assured as he finished soaping his hair and dipped his head under the water. "There was a lot of dirt!" That was an understatement. The rain seemed to have allowed the mud and dirt to slide beneath his armor and clothing to be imbedded directly into his skin.

Gobber shivered, the whole concept of a bath terrified him. When Toothless tried to sneak in past the curtain, as he had several times since Hiccup had gone in to bathe, Gobber pulled him back. "He doesn't need yur help, ye silly beast."

Hiccup grinned and rinsed himself once more as he heard the front door open.

"Is he still bathing? Did I miss it, 'cause I'm happy to help if he's having trouble..."

His eyes widened at the sound of Ruffnut's voice, and he bolted up from the bath. His foot immediately slipped and sent him back into the water with a splash. Resurfacing, he wiped the water from his eyes and quickly crawled out onto the hard wooden floor. He reached up for the towel draped across his father's trunk.

"I'm done!" he croaked and wrapped the towel tightly around his waist, just as a female hand reached through the curtain. He immediately slid backwards across the floor to the wall.

"Don't even think about it!" Tuffnut ordered and the blanket quickly fell back into place. "You'll just make him sick, and he'll have to get washed all over again!"

Hiccup heard the sounds of flesh on flesh, then the clanging of helmets, and knew the twins were hitting each other again. Finally, Gobber stepped in and put an end to it, though Hiccup couldn't hear all of what the blacksmith was saying.

Toothless slunk through the curtain and stood protectively between Hiccup and the other room.

"Good boy," Hiccup whispered patting the Night Fury then using the dragon to help him up off the floor. He quickly dried himself with the towel, then wrapped it around his waist again as a hand appeared at the curtain a second time.

"Are ye decent?" Gobber demanded.

"Depends on who you ask!" Snotlout chortled.

"And who's coming through!" Hiccup called out as dropped down on his father's trunk and reached for his only clean pair of britches.

The curtain swept open and Gobber stepped through, in full battle dress, with a cloak over his hook arm and a large wrapped bundle in the other. He let the curtain drop behind him and shook his head. "Ye canne wear those, Hiccup."

"I have to," Hiccup said as he reached for the sleeve to pull over his stump. Gobber seeing his stump didn't bother him, after all, the blacksmith had his share of them. "My other clothes are filthy."

"No, ye dinna have ta." Gobber dropped his packages on the bed and unwrapped the bundle. "Do ye really think yer father would let ye get married in day clothes? His own boy, a Chief's son?"

Hiccup blinked and rose again, bracing himself on Toothless once more. His father? His father wasn't here anymore. "I...I don't understand."

Gobber pulled from the bundle a pair of rich brown trousers and tossed them at Hiccup. "These will do better."

Hiccup caught them, almost stumbled as the action threw him off balance, and stared at them. One leg was cut higher than the other, same as all of his leggings were now.

"Will, dinna just stand there with yer bits hangin' out. Put 'em on!"

Hiccup sat back down on the trunk and pulled the trousers on, removing the towel he'd had wrapped around his waist, once they were secured.

"Now yer leg, see how they fit with it."

Hiccup reached for his complex prosthetic leg and the leather bindings he needed to secure it. It always took him awhile to fasten it properly, which is why he often just slept with it on, but it was worth it because it gave him far better security than the old one, more solid footing over all, and he had two separate end joints to chose from; one for walking one for flying.

He pulled the shorter end of his new trousers around the end of the sleeve, then settled the rounded leather cup over his hidden stump. Sliding the thick leather strap over the top, he pulled it tight as he could, then hitched the extra portion into a slot on back of his prosthesis.

He rose and noticed that fasteners for his leg blended almost perfectly with the color of the new trousers, so they could barely be seen. "Pretty cool." He automatically reached for the old worn tunic, that he had brought down from his room.

Gobber nabbed the shirt with his hook, tossed it over his

shoulder.

"Hey!"

"How do they fit?"

Hiccup smoothed his hands over the trousers. "Very well," he admitted. "Surprisingly."

He actually couldn't believe how well they fit, the fabric moulded to his long, skinny legs and was neither really hot, like his leather ones were, or too itchy like the wool. He'd always had to make his own clothes because regular Viking attire swallowed him, or hung too loosely on his lean frame.

He bent and secured his boot as Gobber nodded and tossed him a deep burgundy, long sleeve tunic.

"Put this on."

Hiccup stared at it, confused. "Where?"

"Do as you're told, lad." Gobber insisted, and when Hiccup just stood there staring at the new shirt, added. "Now, Hiccup."

"Gobber," he began as he slid on the dark burgundy tunic. His eyes widened at how incredibly soft it was. This wasn't the standard wool from the village! "Where...where did this..." He looked at his trousers, then ran his hands over the shirt. "All this come from?"

"Dunno, but it's pretty." Gobber pulled a deep green gambeson out of the bundle. "And it goes with this."

Hiccup stepped forward to touch the traditional padded jacket, fingering the gold crisscrossed lacings down the front and across the padded sleeves, just above the elbow joints. He had never seen a more impressive article of clothing in his life.

"It's...wow!" He lifted his gaze to Gobber, flabbergasted. "I...this is for me?"

"Aye, all for you, lad."

Hiccup slipped into the jacket, with Gobber's help, and laced it half way up his chest, stopping when Gobber put a hand over his.

"There's good."

The jacket was a tailored fit, the padding squaring his shoulders, the sides hugging his waist and falling to just the very top of Hiccup's thighs. The burgundy tunic shone through the unhitched lacings at the front and sleeves of the jacket, adding a vibrant touch of flare to the outfit.

"Gobber, come on. Where did you get all of this and why...why does it fit me so...so perfectly?"

"I told ye, it's from your father."

"But he...Gobber. It can't be from Dad."

"Aye, it can be." Gobber placed a hand on Hiccup's shoulder. "When Fin Hofferson and Stoick agreed to your marriage with Astrid, your father gave your measurements to trader Johann for his next trip East." Gobber smiled broadly. "He dropped these off the last time he was here."

Hiccup grew quiet. "That was...over five months ago."

"Aye, and Stoick was beyond delighted with what Johann returned with. I've been holding it at the my place ever since."

Hiccup turned to the large looking glass on the wall; it had been his mother's and his father had kept it in his room, perhaps to remember her by. "So...he knew what it...what I would look like in this...these clothes?"

"Well, he had a fair idea anyway, and he'd be as pleased as I am by the sight."

Hiccup barely recognised himself in the fancy attire. He looked like...like a Viking Prince, instead of just a village Chief, or a Hiccup. "I...Thank you, Gobber."

"Well now, I've had a hand, and a hook in to look after you since you were born. Don't think it stops just because yer all grown up."

Hiccup turned and stared at the man that had been such a big part of his life, and then was across the room and being crushed in the Viking's massive arms. "I'm glad," he whispered. "If I can't have Dad, I'm glad I still have you, Gobber."

Gobber sniffed suspiciously, before gently shoving Hiccup back. "We're not done yet." He picked up the cloak. "Ruff dropped this off. It's from your mom."

Hiccup accepted the long leather patchwork cloak, trimmed with mink and etched on the back with the symbol of a man, his flaming sword lifted as he stood on the back of a Night Fury, battle ready and brave. There were two rounded iron clasps at the shoulders.

"Gods!" He ran his hands over the representation of him and Toothless. "How...it...It's beautiful! How did she...How could she have...?"

Gobber shrugged. "She's Valka, she was always a grand hand at leatherwork, and could sew faster than a Night Fury could fly." He glanced down when Toothless grunted. "No offence."

Hiccup turned back to the mirror and slid the cloak over his shoulders, astonished at the change it made in him. It still looked like him and yet...so different!

"Every Chief needs a good battle cloak," Gobber insisted and reached once more into the bundle for the last piece. "And this is from me."

Hiccup turned and looked at the leather harness the blacksmith held

out. It was partially covered by silver plate-mail that had been polished to a shine, and initialled in Viking script at the bottom.

"Toothless-Alpha of Berk," Hiccup read aloud and grinned at the Night Fury. "That's you, Bud! That's your name and title, right here."

Toothless sniffed at the breastplate, purred and nudged Gobber's hand.

Gobber smirked. "I figured the best man should be properly dressed too."

Hiccup's face exploded with excitement. "How do you like it, Bud?" he asked. "Would you like to try it on?"

Toothless nodded and sat up on his hind legs so that Hiccup and Gobber could secure the straps around the saddle on his back. It fit perfectly against the Night Fury's chest, and when Hiccup pulled him to the mirror, the dragon saw how well it looked on him. He lifted his head, as proud as a peacock.

"Wow! You look amazing!" Hiccup grinned and put his arm around his friend as they stared at their reflections. "We both look amazing!"

Toothless purred in agreement, and then led the way as they stepped out into the main room. The other riders, who were also now dressed in their best outfits, stared at them in stunned silence.

"Holy Thor!" Snotlout cried. "Where's Hiccup?"

Hiccup smirked as Fishlegs hurried over.

"Great Odin's Ghost! You look like...like...a king!"

Hiccup blushed and straightened his jacket.

"I gotta say, you look do good," Tuffnut agreed, putting a finger to his chin and inspecting Hiccup more critically. "But I think yellow would have been better than green, or maybe a nice azure."

Ruffnut stepped up, walked around Hiccup, slowly enough that he grew uncomfortable and his cheeks blazed hotter. "Y.U.M." She ran a hand through his damp hair. "You sure you want Astrid, 'cause I can totally get behind you." She caught his chin, lifted his gaze to her smirking one. "Or in front, if you like."

He grinned, nervously and batted her hands away. "I...I'm good, thanks."

"Yes. You. Are."

"Tuffnut, get your sister under control," Gobber sighed.

"Yeah, like I haven't been trying to do that at all since, like, birth!"

"You should put something on those hands, man," Snotlout advised,

noticing the blisters and cuts covering their Chief's palms, from where he had been digging through rocks earlier.

"Oh." Hiccup looked down at them, well they weren't too bad. He moved to a cupboard and pulled out a tiny jar of salve, applied it to his hands. "I didn't even notice them."

"Here." Tuffnut offered him a pair of fingerless leather gloves. "These don't go with what I'm wearing anyway."

"Thanks." Hiccup slid them on so the salve would have time to heal his hands and not immediately rub off when he started using them. He turned back to his friends. "So...I guess I'm ready."

Toothless released several rumbles.

"Oh! Right. The rings!" Hiccup darted up the stairs, then heard the others cooing over the Night Fury's breastplate and he smiled.

He went to his wall cupboard and pulled out a small leather pouch. He emptied it into his palm and inspected the rings he had made at the forge. He made both from a piece of his shield, but hadn't shown his friends the first ring, which he had finished shortly before Fishlegs had arrived at the forge. He'd kept it in his pocket, because his ring was almost the same size as Astrid's, actually hers was bigger and that was just embarrassing.

He put the rings back into the pouch and pulled the strap tight to close it, then returned downstairs, where he hung the pouch around Toothless' neck.

"Guard these with your life," he told the dragon and smiled when Toothless pulled his wings so tightly around himself that the pouch could no longer be seen. "Exactly!"

Everyone chuckled as they stepped outside, followed by Toothless, who was somehow managing to walk with his wings still curled around him.

When Fishlegs reached a hand out to pet him, Toothless growled.

"Wow, he's taking this very seriously."

Hiccup nodded and patted Toothless as he hopped onto the Night Fury's back. "That a way, bud."

"Chief!"

Oh Gods, Hiccup thought instantly as he and Toothless spun around to see two Vikings running towards them. "What's wrong?" he asked worried. "Has there been another slide?"

"No..." one of them began, startled.

"Are we under attack?"

"Dude, you gotta chill," Tuffnut insisted as he and Ruffnut climbed onto Barf and Belch. "It's your wedding night."

"I...we just wanted to let you know everything was ready at the

lookout." the Viking replied, confused.

"Oh. Okay. What about the people who were injured? Have you arranged a way for them to get there without aggravating their injuries?"

"Yes, that won't be a problem."

"We are running short on lanterns, though," the second Viking admitted.

"Give everyone a torch, there are extras in the woodshed, and that should provide enough light," Hiccup instructed. "Keep the lanterns for the hall."

"Okay, oh and we also..."

"You'll also wait until tomorrow for everything else," Gobber insisted suddenly. Hiccup was completely unaware that he had automatically slipped into full Chief mode. "The Chief is getting married."

"If it's something important..." Hiccup began.

Gobber shook his head. "The only important thing right now, is getting you to your wedding."

Hiccup grinned and moments later they were all flying towards the overlook, once used to spot approaching ships and allow advanced warning, it was now a sprawling field of wildflowers that usually took at least an hour or two to climb too; at least before they all learned to ride dragons.

## 17. Chapter 17

\_Well, here it is, the wedding chapter and it is a long one because also contains part of the reception. I hope you find it was worth the wait. I tried to incorporate traditional Viking values and some more modern script for the ceremony, hopefully the mix came out well. Thank you all so much for your patience and of course, for your wonderful reviews! \_

\* \* \*

## ><p><strong>CHAPTER SEVENTEEN<strong>

The soft glow of several dozen torches illuminated the highest point of Berk, where a young man and his dragon waited in the center of the high cliff. Behind them stood his friends, the Riders of Berk, and in front of him was Knut, one of the most distinguished elders of the tribe. Beside him stood Gothi, the high-elder, whose blessing was needed for the marriage to take place.

Gobber and Valka stood to the left of Hiccup and the riders, to represent his family, and Fin Hofferson waited on the opposite side, with Ruffnut and a young girl named Olga. Those that had been injured in the rockslide sat or were supported by their families on mats along the ground behind the procession, giving them a full view of what was to come. In the air around them was a host of dragons, each

with a person, or a couple upon their backs.

A horn sounded into the night and the dragons and riders flew into two separate lines over the land and crashing waves below the point. The dragons extended one wing each, while their riders lifted their swords. A moment later, a Deadly Nadder, wearing a fluffy white veil upon her head, proudly flew underneath the dragon wings and Viking salute.

Stormfly landed just a few feet back from the rest of the wedding party and gracefully lowered herself so that her rider could easily slip off.

Fin Hofferson stepped up and lifted his niece, now a beautiful bride in a blue and gold dress, off of her dragon. Astrid smiled at him, as he adjusted the golden, floral wreath upon her head and smoothed a hand down her long, golden hair, which fell well past her waist.

He walked her to Hiccup, offered the Chief his niece's hand, then bowed respectfully and stepped back.

"Wow," Hiccup whispered.

Astrid smiled at him, her eyes shining with love, as Stormfly settled behind her. "You look...amazing." She reached behind him to caress Toothless. "So do this handsome fella."

Pleasure radiated from Toothless as he sat back on his haunches to show off his breastplate and smacked his lips.

The villagers moved their dragons into a circular pattern around the point; stacked twelve wide and four high, like the stands in a roman coliseum.

"Marriage is a sacred promise," Knut began. "Between two people, who are found suitable and agreeable to joining their lives together. May you always find a way to talk to one another, to confide in each other, to laugh with each other, to enjoy life together, and to share moments of quiet and peace when the day is done."

Astrid smiled at Hiccup, and he returned it.

Knut paused and looked at Gothi, who dipped a small bough of fir into a basin of wine, then moved to the young couple.

A section of heavy cloth had been placed on the ground for them to kneel upon, and so they each bent on one knee and bowed their heads. Gothi gently brushed the fir bough over each of them, sprinkling the drops of wine as Knut offered the marriage blessing.

"May love flow between you as endless as the waters of Hvergelmir, as powerful as Thor's Hammer, and as fierce as the fires of Muspelheim. May the joy of youth and the wisdom of age bless your hearts, until that day when the glorious final battle is upon you."

Gothi smiled at them, bid them rise and indicated that they face each other for their ceremonial pledges.

Hiccup turned to Astrid and took her hand in both of his.



"I, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock, do pledge my intentions before The Goddess Var, and the Almighty Odin, for this woman, so that she may bear my name, share in my properties and entitlements and that she be known forever more as my wife."

Astrid was impressed at how clearly Hiccup had recited the traditional vows. He hadn't stammered once through his speech and showed none of his usual nervousness.

She had been horribly anxious, from the minute she had put on Valka's wedding dress and had her hair and crown arranged, but as she flew in on Stormfly and saw her husband-to-be waiting for her, looking so proud and handsome, her anxiety had immediately eased.

She was marrying Hiccup Haddock, a man who understood her, accepted her and as an equal, and no matter how much she tried to hide behind her warrior persona, he never seemed to forget she was also a woman. She had never wanted anything so much in her life than she did to marry this gifted, amazing man.

She realized it was her turn to speak and her conviction shone in her voice.

"I, Astrid Hofferson, do pledge my acceptance, before the Goddess Var and the Almighty Odin, to bear this man's name, to reside in his home and upon his lands, to be a faithful and devoted wife throughout the end of all days, so that he shall be known forever more as my husband."

"May we have the rings?"

Hiccup signalled to Toothless who stepped forward and proudly lifted his head to expose the important pouch. Several people awed and a few chuckled as Knut pulled off the pouch and gave Toothless a quick tickle under the chin.

The elder turned to Gothi and opened the pouch to drop the rings into her hand. She held each of them up to the torchlight and the beam of the moon, then smiled at Hiccup and nodded.

Hiccup released a small sigh of relief that the rings were acceptable.

"The ring is an ancient symbol used to seal a solemn promise." Knut said as Gothi dipped the rings into a bowl of jasmine water, then held them lightly over a flame, to dispel the moisture. "These wedding rings, the perfect circle of love, will serve as symbols of your unending devotion and faithfulness and remind you of the vows and covenants you have made today."

Gothi held out her hand and Hiccup and Astrid both picked up the other's ring. Now came their personal vows.

"Hiccup, place your ring on Astrid's finger and speak your promise."

When he hesitated, Astrid wiggled her eyebrows. "You did remember to write something, didn't you?"

Hiccup looked at her, glanced at the expectant crowd around them,

then slowly lowered his head.

She read the shame in his eyes and realized, with everything that had happened, everything he had needed to do as Chief, he wouldn't have had the time to write anything.

"Just speak to me." She caught his chin and pulled it up so he would meet her gaze. "Just to me, babe. There's no one else here but us."

Hiccup stared into the eyes of the woman he loved and spoke from his heart. "I love you." he whispered.

It was such a simple statement, Astrid thought, one he had said to her a hundred times, but this time he spoke with such raw, naked emotion that tears flooded her eyes and the calm she had been feeling fled.

"You are...you are the light that guides me through the darkness," he said quietly. "You are...the hope I search for each day when I wake, and the dream I wish for each night when I close my eyes."

He lowered his eyes to their joined hands. She had such soft hands, considering the amount of training she did. Soft hands, and such a soft, generous heart. He lifted his eyes to hers again and felt himself filled with wonder that this woman, this brave and beautiful maiden wanted him.

"I...can't promise that I'll be easy to live with." He glanced over his shoulder to his mother and his gaze softened, as he recalled the vision of her dancing with his father. He turned his attention back to Astrid, his warrior, his bride, his love. "Or...or that I'll bring you rings of gold or...sing you poetry ..."

Astrid pretended to pout, trying to put them both at ease.

"What I can promise is to love you with all my heart and to devote my life to making you happy. And I promise to show you my love and...my gratitude each and every day because you..." He took a deep, shuddering breath. "You...chose me."

Astrid chewed hard on her lower lip, willed herself not to cry as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

"I give you this ring, as a symbol of my commitment to be your husband, and to join my life with yours."

Knut, deeply moved by Hiccup's intimate and loving tribute, glanced out at the guests. Some were clearly stunned, others were beaming proudly and more still were wiping their eyes.

He cleared his throat several times. "Ahem...okay. Astrid, place your ring on Hiccup's finger and speak your promise."

Astrid stared into Hiccup's eyes. She'd haphazardly written some basic vows, there hadn't been time for poetry, but in the wake of his words, she knew she had to do as he did, and speak from the heart.

"Hiccup, you are the most meticulous, weirdest, kindest, most

ridiculously trusting man I've ever known." She watched him smirk, wryly. "I used to think all of that made you weak, that it made you less of a person. But I was wrong. We were all, so very wrong. You showed us, you showed me, that behind your meticulousness was an amazing intellect, and behind your weird ideas was really the future of Berk. You showed that your kindness was really strength, and that your trust was really hope, for you, for us, for everyone to have a better life."

Hiccup was stunned, and could not have spoken in that moment even if a Screaming Death was attacking.

"For years you were just a stitch in my side, and then, suddenly, you grew into the brightest, boldest, most treasured tapestry of all. I promise to be your wife, your comrade in arms and your champion on the battlefield. My place is forever at your side, on the ground or in the air, and I will spend the rest of our days proving to you how much you are respected, how much you are needed, and how very much you are loved."

She slipped the ring on his finger, smiled how those fingers trembled at her touch, then immediately curled around hers. "I offer you this ring as a symbol of my commitment to be your wife, and to join my life with yours."

Hiccup managed to recover from her incredible tribute by resorting to his usual coping mechanism. "Does that mean you'll finally stop trying to beat me in the Dragon games?" He teased, so that only she could hear.

She smiled. "Not a chance."

Gothi placed Astrid's left hand on Hiccup's left wrist, then did the same with their right hands. She wrapped a gold colored rope around their joined wrists, then Knut set a small idol of Mjolnir over their bound hands and placed his hands on their heads.

"Thor, we ask that you give this couple your strength and your protection, that they may weather all challenges and survive all battles you see fit to set before them. We ask Freyja to bless them with strong, healthy children and an everlasting love through all of their days."

Gothi brushed them once more with the fur branch dipped in wine, then lifted her hands and bowed.

"Now shall we present for the Hooligan Tribe, Chief Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III and his wife, Astrid Hofferson Haddock."

A cheer rose around them as they kissed and Toothless let off a plasma blast that brightened the sky above. The other dragons followed and the night was ablaze with fire and light.

The bride and groom flew back to the hall on the back of the Best Man, then moved to the middle of the room, where a table was waiting for them to sign the registry. Hiccup signed first, then Astrid signed beside his name. Valka and Fin signed as guarantors, then Fishleggs and Ruffnut signed as witnesses.

Toothless whined.

"Aww, I think he wants to sign too," Fishlegs stated, amused.

"He's a dragon," Knut reminded. "His foot is bigger than the book."

Toothless huffed and whined and brushed against Hiccup, entreatingly.

Hiccup glanced around, spotted a man with a walking stick. He walked over. "Could I borrow that just for a moment?"

"Sure thing, Chief."

Hiccup brought the stick over poured a small amount of ink over the bottom, then set the registry book on the floor. "Here you go bud, make your mark."

Toothless gingerly took the walking stick in his mouth, walked around the book twice, examining it from every angle, before dipping his head sideways and touching the stick to the page once, leaving a small, but perfect blob of ink at the bottom of the page. The dragon looked at them, to see if they were as impressed by his signature as he was.

The hall erupted with laughter and applause and Toothless, eager to earn more tried to dot the book again, but Hiccup gently pulled the stick and register away.

"Once is enough, Toothless." Hiccup grinned at his marriage record with a feeling of pride. It had the names of everyone important to him, including, now, his best friend. It would have been nice if his father could have been here.

He shook off the sadness, handed the book back to Knut, who also sighed it, then he accepted a towel from Tuffnut to wipe the ink off the Viking's walking stick and handed it back to him.

He noticed that the Chief's table had been pushed farther against the front, and was now on a raised, hastily constructed platform, while the injured were being settled in beds to the left and right of the beautifully decorated table.

Other tables lined the hall, filled with delicious smelling food and pastries. Astrid and Hiccup were led to the Chief's table where they sat facing their people. Toothless and Stormfly settled behind them and were given a basket of fish each. Valka settled next to her son and Fin settled by Astrid, so that only the four of them were at the table.

"Well, this isn't officious at all," Hiccup murmured, wryly and smiled at Astrid when she slipped her hand into his above the table.

"It's an important day, you're an important guy. Just go with it."

"Yes, dear." He winced when she squeezed his hand, hard.  
"Ow!"

"\_Don't\_ call me that."

"Now Astrid," Fin chuckled. "Not even five minutes married and you're abusing your husband?"

"Actually it's been about five years..." Hiccup began, and then released a laughing yelp as Astrid's grip tightened even more. "Come on! I'm just getting the feeling back in it after Snotlout."

She grinned at him, baring her teeth. "You call me dear again and I'll chop it off."

"Okay! Okay, I won't call you that anymore," he agreed, then a slow smile crept across his lips. "Sweet cheeks." He just barely missed the slap she aimed for his head.

"Astrid!" Fin warned, not as amused the time. "He's our Chief and you're in public, girl. Don't disrespect him."

Astrid flushed and lowered her hand, which Hiccup gently pulled into his.

"Sorry," he offered quietly. He supposed they'd have to be careful how they played around now, at least around others. He lifted her fingers to his lips, kissed them. "I love you."

She pretended to be mad, but she really wasn't. She let herself react to him the way she always had, the way he expected her to, really, but they were grown up now and her uncle was right. She couldn't make Hiccup appear weak, not even in jest, and not in front of the tribe.

"Don't be mad," he pleaded softly.

Sensing he was actually getting upset over it, she leaned in, kissed his cheek and whispered in his ear. "I'll deal with you, later. \_Chief\_."

He smiled again, relieved and whispered back. "Promise?"

She laughed.

Two serving girls brought them their meals and Hiccup's eyes rounded. He picked up the perfectly roasted piece of white meat. "What...where...is this...?"

"Pork," Fin replied easily. "I hear Snotlout brought it in."

So that's where he had gone! Snotlout had risked Changewing Island to capture some wild Boars for the wedding feast. Hiccup looked at Astrid who was smiling ruefully at her new husband. "He...for the...and I..." He slapped his hand to his face and groaned. "Man. I don't think I can handle a considerate Snotlout."

She giggled and then nudged his elbow. "Well, don't just sit there staring at it, eat something so the rest of us can too."

Hiccup's head shot up and he noticed everyone was watching him, waiting for the Chief to take the first bite, before they touched their own meals. He quickly bit into a piece of pork and gave them a

thumbs up. The noise in the hall rose to a celebratory level again as everyone started to eat.

He scanned the crowded tables, spotted his usual one with his friends and fellow riders gathered around it. He watched and waited, until Fishlegs poked Snotlout and pointed towards the front table.

Snotlout met Hiccup's gaze and lifted his chin, haughtily. Hiccup bowed his head to him, ever so slightly, but it was enough for Snotlout to respond in kind, then the Viking grinned turned back to his meal and started talking to his comrades animatedly.

"How do you feel?" Valka asked her son quietly.

"I'm okay," he admitted, just as quietly. "I feel...really good." He glanced at Astrid who was chatting with her uncle as she ate. "Happy." And he realized how mind blowing that simple statement was.

He was happy, really and truly happy, without any extra worries niggling him, or pending battles to plan, or the fear he might disappoint someone slowly chipping away at that happiness. He felt happy when he flew on Toothless, of course, and he always felt good with Astrid, but this was something more. This was a feeling of pure contentment, and that was something new to him. He couldn't ever remember feeling anything quite like it before.

She smiled at the flickering expressions on her son's face. "I'm glad. You deserve some happiness, son."

He met her gaze. "So do you, Mom." He pushed his food around on his plate, studied it. "I hope you can find it here."

"Oh, Hiccup." Valka slid her hands into his hair. "I found it the day I found you."

He glanced at her, shyly. "Really?" She nodded. "What about...I mean, your home was destroyed and your Alpha and...and Dad."

She shook her head. "The Alpha was never mine, Hiccup. He was a friend, a protector, but never mine and my home...well, my home is here with your now, for as long as you'll have me."

"Forever," he said without hesitation. "I don't want to ever lose you again, Mom."

"You won't," she promised. "And as for your father..." She sighed heavily and put her hand to his cheek. "Every time I look at you I see him, and I remember the love we shared. That makes me happy too."

Hiccup turned in his seat to fold his arms around her. "I'm so very glad you're here."

"And here I'll stay," she promised, for the second time. "I love you so much, Hiccup."

When he released her, he was smiling but his eyes were shining with emotion.

Astrid, who had watched their quiet exchange, slid her hand under the table and rubbed Hiccup's good leg. "You okay, babe?"

He smiled at her, nodded and took another bite of food. "I'm absolutely perfect."

After the feasting and toasting, which Hiccup endured most graciously while tale after tale had been revealed of his less than stellar childhood, the music began and he reluctantly followed his bride to the middle of the floor.

"You know I'm no good at this," he muttered, indicating his metal leg.

"Gobber just as a wooden peg and he can dance circles around the rest of us," she reminded as she lifted her wrist to his.

"I'm not Gobber. I have no balance or coordination! Astrid..."

"You ride a Night Fury!" she reminded as they moved in a circle, keeping their wrists together.

"That's different!" They changed wrists and turned to circle the other way. "Who invented dancing anyway? They should be boiled in oil."

Astrid couldn't help it, she laughed, full and out loud and didn't even mind the startled glances they received, or those that smiled at her. "Oh, babe," she said as he took her hand and she wove under his arm. "You're such a Hiccup."

"I've been trying to tell you..." He insisted as he caught her other hand and passed him behind her; he could feel the warmth of her body brush against his back and knew he hadn't extended his arm far enough. He cursed softly.

"You're doing great," she assured as she lifted his wrist to his again.

"Stop talking, you're distracting me."

"Awww. Are you counting the steps?"

That was exactly what he was doing. "Ssshhh." They changed wrists and circled back around.

"I love you, Hiccup," she said at the point when he was to draw her close again and their arms were raised over their heads. "I don't care if you can dance, I just love to watch you move."

He flushed with pleasure, carefully twirled her under his arm and then paled as the music changed to the wedding song his father had danced with his mother. "No, no!" He insisted and pulled back from her. "I can't do this one!"

"It's easy," she insisted as several other couples joined them on the floor, including Tuffnut and Snotlout, which shocked the hell out of her.

"Astrid, no. I...I'm sorry, but..." He glanced towards his mother, saw the memory in her gaze, even as she smiled at him, encouragingly.

"Hiccup..."

"Please, Astrid... It's too fast and I don't want..." he lowered his voice. "To fall over in front of everyone."

Her heart went out to him, even as Gobber appeared beside them.

"Mind if I borrow your wife, Hiccup?" he asked, smiling broadly, but something in his eyes showed that he understood why they weren't dancing.

"Be...be my guest," Hiccup encouraged. "Just remember, she's my wife."

"I'll bring her back relatively unscathed," the blacksmith promised and twirled a giggling Astrid into the fray.

Hiccup returned to the table and grinned as he watched them dance. He loved to watch people dance, he was just didn't like to join in.

"Hiccup?"

He looked down at his mother's hand on his arm, and lifted his eyes to her questioning gaze. "I'm not that secure on my leg, Mom," he replied, indicating the fast kicking steps the others were performing. When she continued to stare at him he added. "That's the only reason."

Yes, the song reminded him of his mother and father dancing, but it was a good memory and was not why he chose to step away.

She nodded, then rose and pulled him up with her behind the table. "Dance with an old woman then."

"It's too fast..."

"We can imagine our own music," she assured as she stepped, tentatively into her son's arms, took his hand. "I've always dreamed of dancing at my son's wedding."

He smiled at her and laid his hand at her waist. "I never even considered it a possibility, until recently."

"Oh, Hiccup. I am sorry."

"No." He pulled her closer, smiled when she laid her head on his shoulder as they slowly turned in a circle on the platform. "No more apologies. No more guilt. We both have to move on, Mom. I love you and I want you to be happy here." He pulled back enough to look into her eyes. "Starting over, remember?"

She sighed happily up at him. "How did I manage to get such an amazing son?"



He shrugged. "Must be in the blood."

She smiled and pulled him close again, closed her eyes as they both danced to their own, soft, swaying tune.

## 18. Chapter 18

\_Great Odin's Ghost! 100 reviews! Thank you so so much! I am glad you enjoyed the last chapter, and I am sorry for anyone who I made cry (well, I'm not really, but I thought I'd put it out there. ;-))  
Thank you all so so much for the wonderful reviews. \_

\_In this chapter, there is a song that I was listening to while I was writing called Captain Wedderburn; it is sung by Great Big Sea. It got stuck in my head and I thought it made a cute link to tradition, after all, there has to be some discomfort for the young couple. :-)  
I've adjusted some of the words to make it more 'viking' like, and I hope you'll excuse my little fluffy piece, but I just couldn't resist it.\_

\* \* \*

### ><p><strong>CHAPTER EIGHTEEN<strong>

Hiccup leaned up against a wall, away from everyone else, crossed his arms and his peg leg over his ankle, then just watched as his family and friends, his tribe, celebrated the night away. He was exhausted. He just wanted to take Astrid and go home and sleep. Well, afterwards, they'd sleep; he wasn't \_that\_ tired. But Astrid was having too much fun talking and laughing with anyone, so he could wait until she was ready.

An hour earlier, he had bid goodnight to those that had been injured in the rockslide, thanked them for staying for his wedding and promised to check on them in the morning. His mother had reconnected with a woman who had been a newlywed the same time she had been married to Stoick, and they were seated at a table laughing and chatting. Gobber had danced with everyone at least once, men and children included, and he had, unfortunately, serenaded Hiccup and Astrid twice.

"Here ya go, Chief!"

A mug of ale was placed in his hand and a hard clap landed on his shoulder, as the Viking walked away. Hiccup didn't even look at the drink, he just dumped it in the large basin behind him, which was actually getting quite full. People had been refilling his drink all night, and while he'd enjoyed the ceremonial cup of wine at supper and one small tankard of mead, he'd discretely been getting rid of the rest all night.

He was a complete lightweight when it came to alcohol, and all it did was make him sleepy. He was already tired and he didn't want to pass out on his wedding night. Astrid would kill him for one, and secondly he intended to remember every single moment of this night.

He noticed Toothless and Stormfly nestled in a corner; the Night Fury enthusiastically showing off his breastplate and new top fins that Valka had discovered for him; Stormfly looked suitably

impressed.

Hiccup smirked as he watched them, then turned his head and almost gave himself whiplash look away from Snotlout and Ruffnet, necking in another corner. "Gods!" He groaned slapping a hand over his eyes. "I'll never unsee that!"

"Unsee what?"

Hiccup glanced at Fishlegs, waved his hand towards the scene, but did not look again. "That."

"Oh." Fishlegs sighed and leaned next to Hiccup. "He's so lucky."

Hiccup wasn't sure that was the proper term. Between Snotlout's arrogance and macho ways and Rufnut's need to pummel everything in sight...He paused. Or, maybe they were well matched after all. He peeked at the pair again, shuddered and turned away. Yeah, he wasn't gonna think about it.

"I know why she chose him."

"his shy and modest personality?" Hiccup asked, dryly.

"No. It's because I'm fat and he's...muscular."

"Fishlegs, you're not fat you're..." Hiccup struggled to find a polite term. "You're husky. Lots of Vikings are and...and Viking women find that...attractive."

"Why?"

"I...I don't know. I'm not a woman!"

"Well, it's easy for you to say, half the girls in the village are in love with you."

"Really?" Hiccup scoffed. "Only half?"

"The rest probably are too, but they're married."

Hiccup flushed. "I...I think you're exaggerating..."

"I'm not!" Fishlegs insisted. "You're so lucky! You're the Chief, you married the prettiest girl in the village. You're lean and built and smart and funny and look like a freaking God! If I was a woman, I'd wanna marry you too!"

Hiccup's face was blazing hot as his discomfort level rose. "Um...How...how much have you had to drink, Fish?"

"Only a few, seven or eight tankards, but I'm not drunk, Hiccup. I'm just..." He sighed heavily. "I'm just dumb, fat and lonely."

Hiccup rolled his eyes; he was hardly the poster boy for self-confidence, so what could he possibly offer his friend in the way of advice? Instead, he turned his attention back to the party, until someone caught his eye.

"Hey," he said pointing to the left. "What about her over there?"

Fishlegs looked in the general direction. "Cute, reminds me of Meatlug."

"Not the dragon." Hiccup pushed Fishleg's chin up. "The girl!"

Fishlegs stared at the small, slightly plump brunette who was currently feeding the small Gronkle beside her with rocks from her hand. "What about her?"

"Go up and talk to her."

"Why?"

Hiccup had to restrain himself from physically shaking his friend. "Because you're lonely, remember?"

Fishlegs shook his head. "She's not my type." His eyes wandered back to Ruffnut, who was now, thankfully, just smiling and chatting with Snotlout.

"Why? Why isn't she your type?" Hiccup demanded pulling his attention back to the young woman across the room. "She's female, she's appears to be unattached..."

Fishlegs shrugged. "I want someone pretty."

"What? Wh...Why, she's almost as pretty as Astrid!" Thor forgive him for that whopper. "Look...look at those big brown eyes and dimples, she has dimples, Fish!"

"Who's prettier than Astrid?"

They both glanced sideways to find the bride glaring at them, one hand on her hip.

How did she do that, Hiccup wondered? How did she always manage to overhear him saying exactly what he preferred she not hear him say? "I...I...Didn't say prettier...I said she is almost...\_almost\_ as pretty."

"Mhmm." Astrid grabbed the front of her husband's jacket and pulled him closer. "And why are you looking at and talking about pretty girls at \_our\_ wedding?"

He sighed defeated. "I don't even know anymore."

"He's just trying to make me feel better, Astrid," Fishlegs offered, quietly. "He thinks I should go talk to that girl over there."

"Helga? Well, why don't you?"

Fishlegs studied the girl. "I'd probably crush her with one hug."

"Astrid can crush me too, but I married her!" Despite being prepared

for the elbow in his gut, Hiccup still winced. "Go on, go talk to her."

"About what?"

"She likes Gronkles, so do you," Astrid advised. "So talk about Gronkles."

Fishlegs hedged. "Ooooh, I don't know..."

Another nameless Viking passed by and refilled Hiccup's empty tankard, before walking off. Hiccup pressed the drink into Fishleg's hand. "Here, have a drink for courage, then attack, man, attack!" He paused. "Don't actually attack, I mean be nice, talk...you know, don't tackle her or anything."

"Okay. Okay, I'll do it!" Fishlegs gulped down the mead, handed the empty cup back to Hiccup and ambled purposely across the room.

"That was sweet of you," Astrid told Hiccup as she started braiding a section of his hair. "Poor Fishlegs."

"Why poor Fishlegs? He's got as much chance as any other Viking does to capture a girl's attention."

She smirked. "Well, not all Vikings are created equal." She nibbled at his ear. "Some, in fact, are just natural at attracting us silly females."

"Like who." He held up a finger in caution. "And if you say Snotlout, I will throw up on you."

"Nope, not Snotlout." She laughed, finished the braid and wrapped her arms around his neck. "I was thinking more of a certain handsome, charismatic, and sweet-talking guy, who also happens to ride a Night Fury."

"I'm the only one who..." He paused and gaped at her. "Oh come on!"

She giggled and caught his face between her hands. "You really have no idea do you?"

"No idea about what? That you and Fishlegs apparently have issues with reality?"

She sighed, twirled his hair around a finger. "Do you have any idea how many girls I had to beat up to keep them away from you?"

He smirked at her, then realized she wasn't kidding. "W...what? You can't be serious."

She shrugged. "I had to protect what's mine, didn't I?" She pulled him in for a deep, slow kiss, felt his arms slide around her in that deliciously familiar way that sent thrills through her. "I'm about all celebrated out, Mr. Haddock."

Thank Thor! "Ready at your command, Mrs. Haddock."

They tried to discretely say their goodbyes, but tradition reared its

ugly head and before they knew it they were being escorted towards the door.

They stopped at the top of the steps outside the hall and stared at the men and women, all holding torches on both sides of the steps, and down the path to his house; lighting the way for the newlyweds.

Astrid slipped her arm into his and felt him take a deep breath.

"We should have just climbed out a window."

"There are no windows in the Great Hall. It's a mountain, remember?"

"I'm putting some in tomorrow." Someone nudged them from behind and he looked down at Toothless. He groaned. "Is this part really necessary?"

"At least we're walking and they're stopping at the door."

"They'd better be stopping at the door or we won't be."

She grinned. "With my parents they carried them all the way to the bed."

He shivered at the idea. "Thank Thor some things have changed."

As they headed down the path, with Toothless and Stormfly behind them, Mulch stepped out of the line and fell in step beside Astrid.

He started singing a traditional mating song.

\_A noblemen's fair daughter  
>Went down a narrow lane.<br>And met with a young Viking  
>who was the keeper of the flame<br>Now my pretty fair miss  
>If it wasn't for the law,<br>You and he in the bed might lie

>Together over next to the wall<br>Together over next to the wall\_

"Oh for the love of Odin," Hiccup groaned as Mulch slid back in line and a female Viking stepped out to walk beside Hiccup.

\_Now, my dear good man  
>Do not be perplexed<br>Before that you might bed with her  
>You must answer questions six.<br>Six questions you must answer us,

>And we will ask them all<br>And you and she in the bed might lie

>Together over next to the wall<br>Together over next to the wall

><em>

The woman stepped back as they came to the door of the Chief's home, where Valka and Fin stood with their torches crossed, baring the entrance.

Hiccup flushed with both pleasure and embarrassment when Valka smiled

and began to sing to him.

\_Now what is rounder than a ring?  
>And higher than the trees?<br>And what is worse than a woman's  
curse?  
>And what is deeper than the sea?<em>

Fin continued the verse.

\_Which bird sings first, which one's best?  
>Where does the dew first fall?<br>Then you and she in a bed might  
lie  
>Together over next to the wall<br>Together over next to the wall  
  
><em>

Astrid knew this song, she'd heard it dozens of times through her  
childhood during other marriages, but she wasn't sure that Hiccup;  
who had never been much of a joiner, would know the proper  
responses.

She was, therefore stunned when he opened his mouth and in a shy, but  
lovely voice sang

\_The sun is rounder than a ring,  
>Vallhala is higher than the trees,<br>Loki is worse than a woman's  
curse,  
>And Hel in deeper than the sea<br>The...lark sings first, and the  
thrush sings best,  
>And the grass is where the dew falls<em>

He smiled coyly at her.

\_So you and I in a bed must lie  
>Together over next to the wall<em>

Astrid blushed crimson, but lent her voice to his.

\_Yes, you and I in the bed must lie  
>Together over next to the wall<br>\_

Fin and Valka lowered their torches, stepped aside and opened the  
door for the newly married couple and as the other villagers softly  
continued the song.

\_He takes her by her lily-white hand  
>And leads her down the hall<br>He takes her by her slender waist  
  
>For fear that she might fall<em>

Astrid and Hiccup stepped inside his house and stared at the living  
area, both almost afraid to look back.

\_He lays her on a bed of down  
>Without a doubt at all<br>And he and she lie in one bed  
>Together over next to the wall<br>And she and he lie in one bed  
  
>Together over next to the wall<em>

Finally, the door closed behind them and the voices of the others

faded away as the Vikings headed either back to the hall for more celebration or to their homes.

## 19. Chapter 19

\_Well, here it is, the wedding night! EEEK! \_\_I tried to be as tasteful as possible here for their wedding night, without revealing too much and not rolling over into an M rating, but still showing the love and importance of what it meant for both of them. I hope I did it justice.\_

\* \* \*

### <p><strong>CHAPTER NINETEEN<strong>

Hiccup was awake. Wide, wide awake, all previous exhaustion had been blown from his body and mind at the quiet closing of the door.

His arm fell away from Astrid's waist and he released her hand as she stepped further into the familiar room.

"So," Astrid said as she crossed her arms over her chest, suddenly nervous in all the quiet. "Um...we're married."

"Yeah." Was it hot in here or was it just him? "Ah..." His eyes glazed over for a moment as he looked around the living area. "I...I guess we should...ah..." He looked at the stairs and Astrid followed his gaze.

"Yeah."

He took her hand in his again, wished his palms weren't suddenly sweating, and slowly they ascended to the loft. At some point during the evening, someone had come in and replaced his bed with a larger one and he stared at it with a mild sense of horror.

"Are you ready for this?"

"I...I think so." She looked up at him. "Are you?"

"It won't be...be much dif...different than the last few nights...um...right?"

"No, no of course not." It would be way, way different she thought, but didn't say that because they were both nervous enough.

A scratching at the window caught their attention and Toothless shyly poked his head in.

"Get down from there ya foolish beast!" they heard Gobber call from below. "They'll not want your bug eyes on 'em while they do their business!"

Toothless suddenly went wide-eyed and released a very un-dragon like \_urk\_ as he slipped back out the window. Hiccup hurried to the window and heard the dragon growl at the blacksmith, who was pulling on his tail. The Night Fury rambled back angrily, while Gobber continued to call him names and pull on his tail as he tried to scramble back in through the window.

Toothless, only his paws and part of his head showing over the rim of the window looked forlornly at his rider, his ears flat against his head.

"Awwww," Astrid smiled, feeling a lovely sense of relief at the distraction. "Let him stay. He looks so sad."

Hiccup smirked as Toothless managed to scramble half way through the window and into the room. "Hey, Bud." He ran his hand over the dragon's head and called out. "It's okay, Gobber!"

Gobber released the Night Fury's tail and dropped several feet down to the ground, landing with a resounding thud. Toothless, no longer encumbered by the Blacksmith's considerable weight, shot the rest of the way through the window, landing on Hiccup and Astrid and tumbling them both to the floor.

"Toothless!" Hiccup laughed as he climbed to his feet then helped Astrid up as well. Toothless hunkered down in the corner in apology.

"Ye cannae have a dragon in there on yer weddin' night!"

Hiccup moved back to the window and waved at Gobber. "I'll put him downstairs!" he assured as Toothless wound affectionately around Hiccup, looking for forgiveness. "It will be fine."

Gobber continued to grumble, then yelped when Toothless jumped back up to the window and shot a plasma blast at his feet. "Here now! Watch that!"

Toothless made a sound that Hiccup had grown to recognize as derisive dragon laughter, then dropped down and moved across the room to get some affection from Astrid.

"Who's a silly boy?" she teased him, ruffling the dragon's ears and receiving a series of deep purrs from him.

Hiccup moved to the stairs and pointed. "Downstairs, Toothless."

Toothless dipped his head and flattened his ears again, glancing up at Astrid for help.

"Just for tonight," she told the dragon gently. "We'll see you first thing in the morning, promise."

"Come on, Toothless," Hiccup started down the stairs, knowing the Night Fury would follow him. He moved the table back against the wall and started a fire. Then he removed the dragon's breastplate and saddle. "You can curl up here, okay?" He pulled some cheese from the cupboard and fed it to the dragon. "I need to be alone with Astrid tonight, Toothless."

Toothless huffed and whined, then finally nodded. At least he was inside the house.

Hiccup rose and moved back to the stairs, then paused and looked at Toothless. "You stay down here, okay? Don't come upstairs until



tomorrow morning, right?"

Toothless settled his head on his paws, a sign he understood and would obey.

Hiccup returned to the loft. "Think we should watch out for Stormfly next?" he teased.

Astrid grinned as and peered out the window, just in case. "Probably not, she has her own room to sleep in."

Well, at least Toothless had given them both a temporary relief from their sudden nervousness.

"So..." Hiccup swung his hands back and forth. "Um...Looks like you're...ah...all moved in already."

"Yeah," she agreed, having noticed that her clothes hung next to his in the cupboard, her armor hung on the wall next to his leather gear, and her axe was next to his shield, by the doorway. "I wonder who brought all my things over."

"I don't know," he admitted and tentatively settled on the unfamiliar bed. "Mom, maybe, or your uncle."

It wasn't his father's bed; the carvings on the head board were different, and this mattress, while was larger and softer than the one he'd slept on for so many years, it wasn't close to the size of Stoick's. It would be strange to sleep in a bed that wasn't his, and he felt a little sad that his bed was gone, but he supposed he'd get used to it. He ran his hands over the patterned quilts that he recognized were from the trunk in his father's room.

He released a quiet breath, clasped his hands in front of him and watched Astrid inspect the room. She was stalling, but he didn't mind, and besides, it gave him a chance to get used to having her things in his space as well. Maybe his mother was right, maybe the loft would be too small for them.

When several long minutes had passed and Astrid was pretending to occupy herself with the drawings on his desk, ones she had seen a dozen times already, he spoke her name.

"Come here," he requested, when she turned to him, and he patted the space beside him.

She flushed, realized she couldn't delay any longer, and did as he commanded, settling almost as carefully on the mattress as he had.

He took her hand in his, inspected the ring on her finger. "Do you like it?"

She nodded and smiled down at her wedding ring, held her hand over his so that both their rings were close together. "It's beautiful. They both are. Did you make them?"

He nodded.

"They really shine."

"Gronkle Iron, from my \_ornate\_ shield."

She grinned and her eyes misted at the simplicity of his response, he didn't even have a clue of his own thoughtfulness. "Then they're even more special."

He smiled at her, then looked away again. "It's so quiet."

She nodded. She had expected to still hear the continuing celebration from the hall, Vikings could be a loud bunch, but their voices had faded away like the wind. Instead, it was just the two of them, and it was so quiet, she could hear Hiccup breathing. She never noticed how slow and even his breathing was. It was deep and thoughtful, like him.

She suddenly wondered what other sounds he made, sounds she hadn't noticed before, and what sounds she might hear later when...She shivered, nervously with just a touch of fear.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "I can close the shutters."

She nodded, because she was too shy to confess the real reason for her reaction.

He rose and pulled the shutters closed, then turned back and watched her study the bed with obvious trepidation.

"We...we can just sleep," he offered softly. "We don't have to do anything you...aren't ready for."

She shook her head slowly. "No, I...I am ready. I do want...I'm just..."

"I know." He returned to her, crouched before her rather than sit on the bed again, to give her space. "Me too."

"Well...we've...There's nothing to be afraid of." She looked at him. "Right?"

"No. No, of course not. " Except that he didn't want to disappoint her. What if he did something...wrong? What if he couldn't please her? Stark naked fear pushed him to confess. "I have \_no\_ idea what I'm supposed to do here, Astrid."

"None?" Her stomach knotted in fear.

"Some!" he amended quickly, and flushed. He rose, backed up a step. "That...I mean I know to do...\_that\_." Sort of, in a kind of hearing rumors and dirty jokes, that he never fully understood, kind of way. He understood the mechanics just not the step-by-step evolution. "I'm just not sure how to...um... get from here to...to...\_that\_."

She smiled as his arms flailed nervously and felt the knots in her stomach ease. "Me either." She spotted a small tankard of wine that someone had left on his desk, rose and poured them each a cup. "I think we're supposed to have this, since it's here."

Hiccup sat back on the bed, accepted the cup she brought him and watched her settle beside him. He had expected her to sip her wine,

and was startled when she knocked it back and drank all of it down, then delicately wiped her mouth.

"It...it's good."

His eyes widened, but figured he should do the same. The spinning started in his head, almost immediately, but he ignored it, took her empty cup and set it with his on the crate that served as his bed table.

"Right. Good," He took her hand, felt his eyes cross and shook it away. "So, you should start."

"Me? Why me?"

"You're always kissing me!"

"That doesn't mean I know how to do...the rest, Hiccup!" she insisted. "Kissing you is easy, and besides, you've done your share of kissing lately."

He groaned and hung his head, realized that the wine had gone straight there and he needed something to clear it. "Aren't we a pair?"

She giggled at the ridiculousness of it and leaned her head against his shoulder. "Why don't we start with something simple?" she suggested. "I'm sure the rest will...um...happen."

"Simple. Okay...okay...like what?"

She bit her lip. "You could...get undressed."

He looked at her, mildly horrified. "Al...all the way undressed?"

"Um...only if you want to," she returned, anxiously, wondering if they could still do what they needed to without being completely exposed. She knew he was shy about his body, especially with the missing leg, and to be honest, she wasn't exactly an exhibitionist herself.

"Ah...do...do you want me to?"

"I...I will if you will."

He stared at her for a long time and she could practically see the wheels spinning in his head, as always, thinking things all the way through before acting. "O...well...okay."

He released a long slow breath, then stood up and pulled off the cloak, which he draped over his desk chair. He supposed he would need to install a wall hook for it later, but then he started wondering where the hook should go, and should he make one hook or two? Astrid had a hood and cape, so maybe...

"Are you okay?"

He turned to face her, flushed that he let his thoughts get away from him. "F...Fine. Just...um...thinking."

His jacket came next, which he took the time to hang in the cupboard. He spotted a small canteen of water on the wall shelf beside it, opened it and took several long swallows, hoping it would counter the effects of the wine.

Astrid leaned her hands back on the bed and smirked, thinking it was going to take forever for him to get naked. "Do you want help with your leg?"

He paused, looked down at his leg. He'd intended to leave it on, to give himself a little more...traction for the coming activities. "Um."

Despite the fact that she had seen him without his leg twice now, and had even slept beside him, he felt anxious about taking it off. After all, this was a really important night and he didn't want to remind Astrid that he wasn't...complete.

Sensing his indecision, his concern, Astrid retracted her suggestion. "Or...you can...leave it on. Whatever you want."

"It...It's just..." If he took it off now he'd have to more or less stay on the bed and wouldn't be able to move around much otherwise, unless he hopped and he hated to hop in front of anyone, except for Toothless of course. "Can I do it...later?"

She nodded. "Of course. Whatever you want."

Suddenly shy about removing his tunic, he remembered that Astrid had seen his bare chest before, just the other night in fact, so he ripped it off, (fast, like a bandage) and tossed it atop the cloak.

"Okay...so...there's that."

Astrid stared at him and felt an unfamiliar flutter in her stomach. Did he really have no idea how gorgeous he was? When she lifted her eyes to his she could see that he truly didn't have a clue. His usually clear green eyes were clouded with doubt and an unmistakable modesty.

Sensing he needed some encouragement, she swallowed her own nervousness, rose and walked to him, placing her hands on his chest. "Smooth," she murmured, like silk, she thought, except for the slightest trace of hair just at the center of his chest and running in an impossibly straight line to his navel.

"Oh yeah, that's me." He rolled his eyes. "Great heir to the Hairy Hooligans tribe." He scowled and ran his hands in front of himself. "Minus the hairy."

She smiled and let her hands float over his shoulders. "I like it better this way."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "Really?"

She nodded. "You wouldn't look...right with a hairy chest."

"But...all Vikings have hairy chests."

"I don't."

Thank Thor, he thought and then flushed. "You...all men have...have them."

She grinned and ran her hands over his biceps. "You've got some muscles here."

"Trick of the light, they'll be gone again in the morning."

"Stop it!" She punched his shoulder, revelled in his soft grunt of pain, and then placed her palm flat against him his chest again. "I can feel your heart beating."

"Hold it there." He covered her hand with his, whispered. "I think it's trying to escape the wine."

She giggled and felt more of her anxiety slip away. He could always make her laugh, always make her feel free to just be herself and do what she wanted, say what she wanted.

"It is going pretty fast." After a moment's hesitation, she reached down, took his other hand and slowly pulled it to her own breast. "Mine too," she whispered and placed her hand over his, in the same way he held hers against his own chest.

He stared down at the placement of their hands and felt his breath catch in his throat. He could feel the rapid rhythm of her heart tapping against his fingers. "Wow," he whispered. Was that a normal pace or was it going so fast because of him?

He didn't move his hand, was too afraid to move it actually, but it felt nice to stand there, feeling each other's heartbeats. "So...this is what it means to be married."

Once again, he had managed to sum up the perfect moment with the perfect words and Astrid felt tears of joy sting her eyes. "I guess so."

"Pretty amazing."

She nodded, and knew then, that she was ready for the next step. The fact that he wasn't rushing her, as most men probably would have, made her even more certain.

She turned and lifted her hair out of the way so that he could access the multiple ties at the back. "Can you...?"

"Oh...okay." Hiccup took a deep breath, then slowly started to unfasten her dress; his hands were shaking so badly that he accidentally knotted it twice. "Sorry. I...I'm sorry," he murmured and tried to untie the knots.

"It's okay." Her voice had grown husky with nerves or anticipation, she wasn't sure which. "Cut it."

"Cut it?"

She nodded and closed her eyes as she felt him move away to retrieve a dagger from his desk. She took several deep breaths, released them, and when he returned to stand behind her again, wet her lips.

"I...I can't Astrid."

"It's okay," she assured. "I can fix it later."

"No, I...my hands are shaking so badly I'm...afraid I'll cut you."

And her heart melted. She turned to him, saw the anxiousness in his eyes, the doubt and something else; something she had never seen before. What was that? His gaze was shy, loving and yet there was something almost...feral in his eyes. She shivered again, this time in anticipation.

She took the knife, reached over her shoulders and managed to cut the knotted strap, felt her dress loosen considerably.

"Sorry," he offered again.

She shook her head, tossed the knife on the floor and caught his hands in hers. She kissed the back of his fingers, then reached up and pulled him closer to claim his mouth. They kissed and kissed, until they were both breathless, and when they parted, they both felt a little steadier. That was something they both knew, something they were both comfortable with.

"Did I tell you how amazing you look?"

She shook her head. "Not yet."

"Well, you do." He smoothed a hand over her hair, which she had worn down around her shoulders for the ceremony, then fingered her crown. "Do you...should I take this off?"

"You're supposed to, yes."

"Oh." He smirked and carefully extracted it; set it on his desk. "No one told me."

There was a lot neither of them knew, she realized. "We were in a rush."

"Yeah." Again his hands caressed her hair, smoothing it down over her back, gently pulling sections out and away from her body, so it would filter through his fingers. "I've never seen your hair out of a braid. You should wear it like this all the time."

"It would get in the way."

"Oh well, I'm happy to stand behind you and hold it while you're maiming someone."

She grinned and then sighed as he continued to play with her hair. Okay, so maybe she didn't have to wear it back all the time. "That feels really nice."

"Really nice," he agreed, then gently released her hair and captured

her face between his hands. "You're my wife, Astrid."

She stared into his eyes. "You're my husband, Hiccup."

Her eyes closed even before their lips touched, and she felt the gentlest of pressure as he walked her backwards towards the bed. She felt the back of her knees hit the frame and nudged his chest with her hand. He stepped back, just enough that she could slip her dress off her shoulders and let it slide to the floor, between them; as per tradition, she wore nothing underneath.

For a long moment, Hiccup's eyes simply roamed her body, then met her shy gaze, silent and unmoving.

She grew uncomfortable and shielded herself with her arms. "You...you don't like me?"

"Yes." He tenderly pulled her arms away from her body and slid them around his waist, so that their bodies were pressed together.  
Yes."

She felt him take a deep breath, and unsure what she should do next, simply waited.

"Gods, Astrid." Hiccup shoved his fingers through her hair, dipped his face into her neck. "I...I can't believe you're...here, with me..." He closed his eyes, held her close. "You're so amazingly beautiful."

She sighed against him, relieved. "Thank you." She stepped back and pulled him with her onto the bed.

He kissed her again, gentle, soft, intimate kisses that made her body sigh with pleasure.

"I could do this," he murmured as he kissed her neck, her throat, her collarbone. "Just this for the rest of our lives." Back to her cheeks, her nose and then her lips again. "And be utterly content."

"I love you," she whispered as he lay next to her, watched the wonder in his eyes, the love. "Oh, Gods, I love you, Hiccup."

"I want to make you happy, Astrid."

"You do."

"I need you to...to tell me if, if you...if I'm not doing something right."

She shook her head. "You're doing everything right, babe." She ran her hands over his shoulders, down his arms. "Everything."

He kept his eyes on her face. "Can I...touch you?"

She bit her lip and nodded. "Anywhere," she agreed.  
"Everywhere."

And so he did.

**\_\*\*So...what do you think? Should I end the story here or do you want more?\*\*\_**

## 20. Chapter 20

\_Okay, because so many asked for a little more on the wedding night (at least that's what it seemed you were asking) I've included the rest that I had written. \_\_WARNING\_\_: while this is not an \_\_explicit\_\_ scene (most of it is them talking) there are some sexual references that deal with a couple's first time having sex so it does contain a highly suggestive theme. I don't think it quite crosses the line to an M rating, so I am putting this warning in instead.\_

\_Thank you all so, so much for the wonderful reviews! And since you seem interested in my continuing the story, I will let you know that I already have several more chapters written, one of which includes Hiccup's surprise. I will try and post at regular intervals, once I have checked them over. Until then, I hope you enjoy this chapter and if you do please feel free to let me know!\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>CHAPTER 20<strong>

"Are you okay?" he asked later, as they lay in each other's arms.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry I hurt you."

She laid her head on his chest. "It's supposed to hurt at first, but it was only for a minute and the rest was fine."

Hiccup winced. Fine? Well, that wouldn't do. He could admit that it had been over rather quickly, but he couldn't help that; he'd simply gotten overly excited.

"I was very proud of you today."

"For what?"

"What you said in the hall, facing up to everyone. Leading the funeral procession and then...following through with the wedding." She smiled. "And what you did for the injured. Well, it wasn't something anyone else would have thought of doing."

His long fingers caressed the soft skin of her arm, which was draped across him. "A very wise person told me once that it was a great honor to be chosen as Chief, so I guess I figured I'd better start treating it like one."

She smiled, recognizing her own words, and brushed her fingers gently over his bare chest. "And what about the rest?"

"The rest?"

"That what you were searching for was in here." She pressed her hand



to his heart.

"Oh. She was wrong about that."

Astrid lifted up on her elbow and raised an eyebrow at him. "Oh really?"

"What I was searching for was here." He moved the hand she lay across his chest to her cheek, and covered it with his own. "What I was searching for, Astrid, was you." He watched the tickle of pink rise in her cheeks.

"Oh Hiccup." She snuggled into him again. "How do you \_do\_ that?"

"Do what?"

"Come up with those... seemingly effortless, unbelievably sweet and flattering comments, that knock a girl off her feet and leave her dizzy for days?"

His eyes widened. "I...Wh...when do I do that?"

She sighed; his obliviousness to how his own words were perceived made her melt even more. "You just did."

"Um..." He scowled, confused. All he'd spoken was the truth. He wondered if she was teasing him again, like the hand gesturing things she had pointed out to him a few days ago? "Oh...kay...do...Don't you like it?"

"Oh yeah, I do." She lifted her eyes to his. "I've just never heard anyone talk like you."

"Is \_that\_ why you married me, because I talk differently?"

"Because you speak, so eloquently, from the heart." She grinned. "One of the many reasons."

"Yeah?" His interest piqued. "What are some of the others?"

She laughed again and smacked his chest, playfully. "I'll make you a list."

"Written proof...I could accept that." He gave her a quick kiss.

They lay quietly for awhile, with only the sounds of their breathing and the feel of their hands gently caressing each other.

Finally, Hiccup spoke. "Are you asleep?"

"No."

"Me either." He'd been so tired earlier, and now he simply couldn't go to sleep. Perhaps part of him worried if he closed his eyes he would wake up and this would be all a dream. Also, he couldn't get the word \_fine\_ out of his head.

"Are you...um...tired?"

"I am," she admitted. "But not really sleepy."

"Good." He gently rolled her onto her back. "I can do better."

"Better?" Her eyes widened in understanding. "You did fine!" she assured, even as he nibbled her neck and allowed his hands to once again roam over her body.

"I don't want it to be fine," he insisted quietly. "It should be more, you deserve more."

"I just meant..."

He paused as he hovered over her. "Will it...I mean...Are you still hurting?"

"No," she assured quickly, even though she had no idea if it would hurt to do again. "But...I mean...before... It felt goo mmhhhh." She stopped talking as his mouth claimed hers again, and gasped as his hands moved lower. "Hic...cup!"

"I can do better," he promised and she giggled, giving in and realized that she was more than willing to let him try.

Much later, as they each tried to catch their breath and recover from sensations neither of them had ever experienced before, he asked.

"B...better?"

"Better!" she gasped and silently screamed so, so much better!

The first time had been gentle, sweet, a little painful yes, but also a little rushed. This time Hiccup had really taken his time, and perhaps part of that was because he had gotten over most of the trepidation he'd had earlier about touching her. Whatever the reason, he had moved her in ways that she never imagined anyone ever would and awakened feelings and responses in her that she never knew existed.

He flopped on his back, relieved. "G...good."

She giggled, crawled over to snuggle against his chest again. "You didn't have to do that, babe," she said, but was secretly thrilled that he had. "The first time really was good."

"No, it was fine," he croaked and wondered what had happened to his voice?

He ran a hand over his face and tried to rid himself of the fear that his heart was going to burst through his ribcage and make Astrid a widow before they'd even been married a day. He honestly didn't know what was happening to him. He'd faced down horrifying dragons, treacherous Vikings and berserkers and, recently, even his own Night Fury, but he'd never, never felt this level of adrenalin pumping through him.

"I...I had to do better than fine."

"Well, you did," she assured and made slow, lazy circles on his deliciously flat stomach.

Boy, did he! Her entire body was throbbing in a deliciously pleasurable rhythm that just bordered on pain. Her arms and legs felt like she'd just finished a three week battle with no rest, and the rest of her...the rest was just soup; just limp, liquid soup.

"Where did you learn to do that...to do...better?"

He opened one eye to peer down at her. "What...what do you mean?"

"Well, did you...did you, um...read about it or...or someone tell you or...um..." She flushed. "P...practice with someone?"

"What!" He caught her chin, pulled it up so she met his gaze. "I've never been with anyone else, Astrid."

"I...I didn't mean to imply..." she assured quickly. "It just...it was...amazing and I...I never heard or...knew about things like that so I..." She dipped her head, ashamed. "I'm sorry. I'm being neurotic. I guess."

"No, I...I guess I can see why you'd ask." He relaxed again, slid his arm around her. "I...I think some of it...most of it really was just, um...instinct," he admitted and gently squeezed her closer to him. "But I'm glad you...you liked it."

"I did. It was...wonderful." With Herculean effort, she rose up on a shaky elbow, stared down into his beautiful face. "I love you."

"I love you."

"What was your favorite part about today?" She watched his slow, obvious smile and found herself blushing. "Okay, second favorite part."

"Our vows," he admitted, softly as he curled his fingers through her hair. "Astrid, the things you said..."

"I meant every word."

"I...I know you did. I just...I've never had anyone say...speak that way about me, certainly not in public."

"Then it was time someone did."

He regarded her, silently, continued to play with her hair which, from the way she was leaning over him, tickled his chest. "I don't blame you."

"I know you don't, babe." She sighed, caressed his cheek. Hiccup didn't blame anybody for the bad feelings they'd had or the way they tormented him for so many years. "But I do."

"But why?"

"Because, I should have been able to see you for the wonderful person

you are, instead of the person everyone else thought you to be."

"Astrid, we were kids! Kids say...stupid things."

"It wasn't just the kids, Hiccup," she reminded gently and that's what angered her.

The adults had turned on him as well, ridiculed him, with the exception of Gobber, and even his own father had been harsh with his words at times. She didn't know if it was just that she was older, or that they were now married and she felt obligated to defend him, but she was suddenly so angry about past events.

"You didn't deserve that, Hiccup. No one did and..."

Hiccup pulled her down and kissed her, until he felt all that anger and indignation melt from her body. "Nobody has the perfect life," he reminded, when he released her. "Especially, not on Berk."

"No, but..."

"You lost your parents, Astrid, both of them." He slid a tendril of her golden hair behind her ear. "And you worked harder than anyone to prove that it didn't bother you, that you could, would still be one of the best fighters on Berk. And then, the stigma from your Uncle Fin, when everyone thought he had frozen in fear when fighting the Flightmare...well, your childhood hasn't exactly been stellar."

"No," she agreed. "But I stood up for myself, Hiccup. When people tried to shame me I showed them that they couldn't. I proved that no matter what they said or thought about me, I was a force to be reckoned with and that their words didn't touch me..."

He cupped her cheek. "But they did touch you, or you wouldn't have been so insistent on going after the Flightmare."

She opened her mouth to protest.

"And you wouldn't have been so upset about losing at dragon training."

"I...I wasn't upset," she began, even as she knew it was a lie.

"You dropped your axe on me, Astrid. You threatened to decapitate me several times." He smirked. "You were upset."

"Fine! So I was upset, but it wasn't because I lost the competition, it was because..." She stopped, flushed and suddenly lowered her head, ashamed.

"Because you lost to me," he finished softly and smoothed his hand over her hair. "The village screw up."

"Oh, Hiccup," she murmured. "I...I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way, I just..."

"I know how you meant it," he assured. "And why you were really angry over it. You put way too much pressure on yourself to be perfect, and

everyone exacerbated that, first by tormenting you, and then by praising you to the point you were afraid to be anything but the best."

She reared up on her elbow again and stared down at him, stunned. How could he know her so well? How could he understand what she had gone through all those years, when they had barely spoken to each other back then?

Seeing the question in her eyes, he simply smiled. "I've loved you since I was five, Astrid. I may have been invisible to you, and a joke to everyone else, but I wasn't stupid. I saw every time someone's words did hurt you, and I saw every time you hurt yourself when you weren't what you thought you should be."

The enormity of his statement astonished her and Astrid blinked at the moisture in her eyes. Needing to separate herself from this sudden, wobbly weakness she was feeling, she deliberately made a joke. "Were you stalking me, Hiccup?"

"I was in love," he said again. "I followed you around like a lost sheep. You were the only thing in my life that seemed...pure and warm and...well...seeing you every day, even if you didn't see me, was all I had to look forward to."

Her lower lip quivered and he reached a finger up to stop it.

"I didn't say that to make you cry," he groaned softly. "Or to...what was it...Leave you dizzy?"

She released a watery laugh and nodded.

"I'm just trying to express myself, to be...honest with you."

"I love that you can be honest with me, Hiccup." She folded her hand in his. "But I think you're making more of it than there is."

He wasn't, he was precisely on target and that scared the hell out of her. She loved him, absolutely, but she had built so many walls around herself to hide her pain, her scars, that the idea of anyone, even Hiccup, getting all the way inside terrified her.

"My parents died in a dragon attack, the way most people here did then, and I was okay with it, because it was part of life and..."

"And being singled out for not being what everyone else is, is also a part of life." He rubbed her arms. "We're Vikings, Astrid, living so far North that even polar bears avoid us."

She smirked.

"We have harsh winters and horrendous storms and subsist on whatever we can catch or hunt. We are forced into treaties with other tribes to avoid war, and when we can't avoid war, we fight to the death with every ounce of courage and conviction that the Gods allow us. We have petty squabbles amongst ourselves, and always have to consider the consequences of everything we do because it could jeopardize our people and our way of life."

"I know all that, but..."

"It's never gonna be an easy life and we shouldn't expected it to be, but it's our life, the life we were born into and holding onto the past will only make that life harder."

Astrid had never heard a more eloquent, more profound speech in her life, and could not help but wonder why Hiccup still thought he would not be a good chief, after speaking such words to her. "You haven't let go of the past," she chided, gently. "You're still comparing yourself to the person you were before. You're still doubting your abilities, because of who your father was."

He nodded. "I know. It's something I have to work on, but I don't want you to feel badly because of any of that. That was never my intention, Astrid. You are an amazing warrior, possibly the best on Berk, but I don't need you to fight my battles."

"I know you don't, but I want to."

He smiled and cupped her cheek. "I know that too, so I won't try and stop you."

"As if you could," she smirked.

"Exactly, but baby, please don't feel you have to compensate for whatever was said or done in the past. I truly appreciate the vows you made, so much so I could never even begin to express it." He cupped her other cheek, so he was cradling her face. "I needed to hear them. I appreciate and understood them, and it was enough." He lifted up to touch his lips to hers. "It was more than enough."

She held his gaze, saw that somehow her words had penetrated to his heart, through his fears and insecurities. "I just want you to be happy."

"I am! Oh, Astrid, you have no idea how happy..." He swallowed, hard. "I never thought I could feel like this and it's really hard to explain, but...marrying you, placing the ring on your finger and hearing the words we said to each other was like...it was like something...clicked inside me. Something fell into place that I didn't even know was displaced."

"Oh, babe," she sighed, blissfully.

"I'm not saying I won't still be neurotic and overly sensitive at times, because...well, that would just be lying, but what I am saying is you make me happy, and with you I know I can do anything. I'm still afraid that I won't measure up to my Dad, but I'm...not as preoccupied with it as I was before." He shook his head. "Am I making any sense?"

She nodded, leaned down and kissed him long and deep. "Perfect sense," she assured and slowly smiled as she tossed her leg over him. "So much sense in fact, that it's given me an idea on how to make you even happier."

"How..." he began as she straddled him, and then his eyes widened in comprehension. "A...Astrid?"

"You appear to be wide awake, Mr. Haddock."

"I...I...think I...possibly am, yes."

"Then let's do something about that."

He chuckled. "You and your need to compete," he teased, and then gasped when she touched him. "I...I...hope you n...never outgrow it."

She grinned and lowered herself over him.

## 21. Chapter 21

\_I am so glad you enjoyed the wedding night chapter, and as requested, here is a chapter starting the following day. Kinda fluffy tho ;-), so you have been warned. I hope you enjoy it as much.\_

\* \* \*

### ><p><strong>CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE<strong>

Astrid's eyes lazily flickered open and almost immediately focused on the beautiful boy, no, beautiful man seated by the bed. Hiccup's head was bowed, his hair falling over his eyes as his left hand moved his pencil over the page of his notebook. He was already fully dressed, including his armor, which was now bright and clean. The sunlight was just starting to seep in through the window, highlighting him in a soft orange glow, making the lantern beside him unnecessary.

She smiled as thoughts of last night penetrated her sleepy brain. She was Mrs. Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III and last night, her new husband had proven that while he was still that curious, incredibly shy and achingly sweet boy she had fallen in love with, he was also now a man. A loving, generous man, capable of such passion, such desire, that her heart and body were still reeling from the night before.

It had been a shame neither of them had been up for a third round, she really hated to lose a competition, but after some seriously heavy petting and lots more kissing they both had to admit they were exhausted and finally just drifted off to sleep in each other's arms. It was still a wonderful wedding night and she had absolutely no complaints. She hoped he didn't either.

When he finally lifted his head to peek through his fringe, he saw her watching him and blushed. Astrid sighed. How could he possibly still be able to do that, after all they had done last night?

He closed the book and set it on the bedside crate, then rose up off the chair and sat beside her on the bed. He reached for the hand she had resting on his pillow.

"Good morning, Milady."

"Good morning, dear Sir." She linked her fingers with his. "How long have you been up?"

"Just a little while."

She scowled, and ran her free hand over his leather suit. "Going somewhere?"

He nodded. "I have to go see what other damage was done by the storm and we need to get back on track with the repairs."

She nodded and started to sit up, but he gently pushed her back. "I can help!"

"You can stay right here," he insisted, leaned in to kiss her tenderly. "At least until I see what has to be done." His gaze studied her face intently, then he pulled a golden lock of her long hair back over her shoulder, concentrated on it as if he had never seen it before. "So...How did you...sleep?" He paused, then murmured. "Please don't say fine."

She smiled, slowly, understanding the real question hidden behind his sudden coyness. She wanted to taunt him for it, but she didn't. She always knew how far she could tease him and never went over the line where it would actually hurt his feelings. He may pretend to have a thick skin, but he really didn't.

She linked her arms around his neck, pulled him closer and forced him to focus on her face. "How do you think?"

"I...I'm not sure." He bit his lip, lowered his eyes.  
"I...you...seemed to...sleep...well."

"Very well. Best \_sleep\_ I've ever had."

His eyes widened slightly, since both of them knew they weren't really talking about sleep, it had better be the \_only sleep\_ she'd ever had. "Really?"

She pulled him closer, kissed him slowly. "Well, I could be wrong. Why don't you climb back in here with me and we'll try getting some more \_sleep\_?"

He moaned, sincerely. "I wish I could, Astrid, but I really do need to get started."

He couldn't stop being Chief just because he got married, but he'd been unable to pull himself away from her while she was sleeping. Normally they would spend a week away from everyone on a honeymoon, but there was simply too much to do.

She sighed, dramatically. "I guess that's what I get for marrying a Chief."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be." She grabbed the belt across the front of his suit, pulled him down to her again. "I knew what I was getting into." She poked the button that released his back fin, giggled when he rolled his eyes.

"Will you stop that?" He rose and reset the calibration, winding his fin back into a concealed position. "I think I'm going to have to



reinstate the law that allows a man to spank his wife."

Her eyes widened. "Ooooh, baby." She laughed when his cheeks went so red they almost matched his hair.

"Impossible woman," he growled, shaking his head, then surprised her by leaning one knee on the bed and yanking her towards him. "C'mere you."

He kissed her, until she was weak-kneaded and trembling and she moaned in protest when he pulled away. "Stay," she whispered and tried to pull him back again.

"I can't. I have to...mmmhh."

Hiccup knew better than to get physical with her, even playfully, and in seconds Astrid had yanked him down and crawled atop him, pinning him to the mattress with her body and her mouth.

"Astrid!" he gasped when she finally released his mouth. "Come on! You're killing me, here!"

She giggled and snuggled against him, trying to ignore the cold, hard feeling of his flight suit against her bare skin. "A little suffering is good for the soul."

He smirked, slid his arms around her and hugged her hard, then gently slid her off him. He turned so they lay facing each other. "Things won't be as hectic soon, and then...then we can go away somewhere, just the two of us."

"Without Toothless and Stormfly?"

"Okay, four of us."

She laughed again. Gods, when was the last time she laughed so much in such a short period of time? "It's okay, babe." She caressed his cheek. "Just being here with you is enough."

"I love you." He leaned into her touch. "Are you tired of hearing it yet?"

"Why? Are you tired of saying it?"

He shook his head. "I'll never be tired of saying it. I just don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"You won't and it doesn't" she assured. "Because, I love you too, and if you get tired of hearing it that's just too bad, because I am gonna keep right on saying it."

"I'm glad, because I do love hearing it."

"Uh...just, y'know, maybe not so much in public because..."

"I know," he grinned, playfully tapped her nose. "You've got a rep to protect."

"Damn straight."

He reluctantly rose. "I promise, I won't be long."

"Okay." She tossed her arms out and flopped back on the bed. "I'll be here, practicing my lazy wife about the house, routine."

He laughed. "Good luck with that." He waved and disappeared downstairs.

Astrid smiled as she heard him whistling and talking to Toothless, then a moment later she heard the front door open and knew they were off. She turned over, reached for Hiccup's notebook and opened it to where he'd stuck his pencil as it had closed.

It was a sketch of her, sleeping, of course, as she suspected it would be. He had drawn her hair flowing like a waterfall over the pillows, covering almost half of it. Her hands, which seemed impossibly delicate in his rendering, were cupped under her cheek as she slept, while the impossibly smooth lines of her bare arms and shoulders were just visible above the covers.

He had obviously spent a painstaking amount of time on her face, filling in every tiny detail. Her closed eyes were perfectly shaped beneath long feathered lashes, her slightly upturned nose seemed more adorable in the drawing than what she considered it to be in real life, and there was a smile of contentment on her lips, where he had also been more than generous with.

She traced the lines of the drawing with her fingertips. It hardly looked like the hardened, boyish warrior she envisioned herself as. Was this portrait of a beautiful and alluring woman how Hiccup saw her, soft, tempting and undeniably female?

It gave her a little thrill to think so. Curious, she turned back a page and her eyes widened at the second sketch of her, this time on her stomach in the bed. There was yet a third drawing of her on her back, her arm thrown over her eyes, and one more where the covers had slipped and left her just barely concealed.

"A little while?" she muttered and kept turning pages to find even more sketches of her. He could draw pretty fast but still, these must have taken him hours! He'd watched her sleep and drawn her for hours!

She fell back on the bed, stunned, and wondered if it was endearing or just really creepy? She opened the book again, studied the details, the softness of the lines, then considered the drawings that hung on his wall. Many were of Toothless, of course, also some of her, his father, his mother, even Gobber.

Love, she decided. This was how Hiccup loved, through his art. She hugged the book to her chest, then put it back on the crate.

Her experiment with being a lazy housewife lasted all of five more minutes, before she tossed back the covers and slid her feet to the floor. She rose, winced. Oh man, okay, she hadn't thought about that.

Carefully, she washed up with the basin of water Hiccup had left for her, then slowly dressed. Was she supposed to be this sore or had they done something wrong last night? Maybe it was just the number of

times they had done it, as opposed to the way they had done it?

She sat back down on the bed and wondered if she would even be able to ride Stormfly today. Maybe staying in bed wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

With a reluctant sigh, she slipped into her armor and started downstairs, just as there was a knock at the door. She opened it and smiled shyly at Valka.

"H...Hi."

"Good morning, Mrs. Haddock," Valka smiled and indicated a covered tray in her hands. "May I come in?"

Astrid stepped back, flustered. That's right, this was her home now. "Um...sure, of course. I mean...it's your home too, Valka."

She and Hiccup had discussed Valka staying with them in the house after they were married, and it was an easy decision. She wouldn't take time away from her boyfriend...her husband, she reminded herself, from his mother.

Her uncle Fin had also been invited to move in after the wedding, as traditionally when a couple wed, the boy's immediate family as well as the girl's would automatically live together. But he had declined, saying he liked his house and was well settled there.

"You can call me Mom, Astrid," Valka offered softly as she set the tray on the table and removed the cloth to reveal a small steaming kettle, a delicate looking cup and a plate of cheese and small slices of brown bread. "If...if you want to."

Astrid blinked in surprise, she hadn't had a mother since she was eight. Slowly, she smiled. "I'd be honoured...Mom."

Astrid knew she'd said just the right thing when Valka bit her lip and to hide her emotional reaction, and deliberately made herself busy by pouring the water from the kettle into the cup. She wondered if Mother and son actually knew how much alike they were.

"Drink this," Valka suggested, setting the cup on the table before Astrid.

Astrid looked down at the light, greenish liquid. "What is it?"

"It's an herbal tea." Valka put the plate of bread and cheese next to the cup. "It's good for...the morning after."

Astrid's face flamed, but she took a sip of the tea. It had a slightly woodsy taste, but wasn't bad really. "Um...so..." She wasn't used to having someone to talk to about feminine things. "I'm supposed to feel...um...have tea after...after..."

Valka nodded. "Most women have tea...\_after\_, honey," she assured. "It's perfectly normal."

Astrid took another sip. "Am...is it...will I need tea...ah...every morning?"

Valka shook her head. "Oh no, not at all."

Valka recalled that she had needed tea for three mornings after her wedding night, but Stoick had been a particularly enthusiastic husband. She smiled at the memory, and wondered if her son had inherited his father's...eagerness.

"And if you do need it for a few more days, that's normal, too." She indicated the food. "Eat. It will settle your stomach."

Astrid's eyebrows rose. How did Valka know her stomach was upset? Not horribly, of course, more just jittery, like she had small birds flapping around inside her.

"Is that...normal too?"

"Not for everyone, but it was for me after my wedding night."

Astrid gaped at her. "I...I'm not...I mean you can't..." She couldn't be pregnant after one time, could she? Okay, twice...Oh no! "I'm not ready for children yet!"

Valka smothered her chuckle with her hand. "It's nothing to do with that, Astrid." She patted her hand reassuringly. "It's just nerves. I had them for almost a week after I got married. It's a big change and a lot to get used to. It doesn't mean you regret anything or don't love Hiccup."

Astrid sighed in relief. "Oh. Okay."

Valka decided not to tell Astrid that she'd had Hiccup eight months after she was wed; no sense panicking the poor girl. Instead, she changed the subject. "I saw him fly off on his dragon."

Astrid nodded, noticed that her earlier soreness was quickly dissipating and reached for a piece of bread. "Yes. He wanted to check if there was any further damage from the storm." She paused. "Did you bring my things over last night?"

Valka nodded. "Your uncle and I did, and I cleaned Hiccup's clothes, they were a sight."

"I can't thank you enough, Valka," She smiled again. "Mom, for...for everything you did for me yesterday, and for Hiccup."

Valka beamed at her. "I want to be part of my son's life, Astrid, and I have a lot to make up for." She picked up a piece of cheese, nibbled on it. "All those wasted years. And then because of me he lost his father..." She shrugged wearily. "Well, I have a long road ahead."

"Stoick's death was no more your fault than it was Hiccup's."

"Oh, I know Drago is to blame, but I...I can't help wonder if I hadn't lured Hiccup back to the sanctuary, if I hadn't, in effect, kidnapped him, his father wouldn't have found him there and so neither of them would have been there when Drago attacked."

"True, but then Drago could have spotted Hiccup while he was flying

and used his Alpha to have Toothless drop him from the sky. Then he'd also be dead."

Valka paled. "I...I hadn't thought of that."

"And we wouldn't have known the power of the Alpha if we had all stayed in Berk instead of going to look for Hiccup, so the whole village would have been destroyed, because Hiccup would not have known how to fight it."

Valka stared at her for a long moment, then reached across and squeezed Astrid's hand. "My son did make a very wise choice."

Astrid smiled and sipped her tea.

## 22. Chapter 22

\_Another little bit for the day after, as our story comes to a close. However I am already working on a sequel, which I hope you will all stay tuned for and read/review as well. Thanks for all the amazing support, suggestions and reviews!\_

\* \* \*

### <p><strong>CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO<strong>

Hiccup inhaled deeply as he and Toothless flew around the island, checking on damage and progress. He dropped in to visit the people who had been injured, as promised, and found they were all doing much better. He was waved down by the little girl who had been pulled from the rockslide, and her family.

"Good morning." He landed beside them and smiled.

"Good morning, Chief. We wished to thank you for a wonderful celebration, and of course." The man indicated his daughter who was shyly pulling at his tunic. "For our Frieda."

Hiccup nodded. "Thank you for celebrating it with us."

"Please, Daddy. Ask him, please?"

"Hush now," The man insisted. "He's far too busy to be bothered with such nonsense."

"Bothered with what?" Hiccup asked, curious.

"It's just..." Frieda's mother paused, bit her lip. "She would like to ride with you, on your dragon."

"She hasn't been on one, she's still afraid of them I think, but she seems to think since you saved her, she'd be safe riding with you."

"We've explained that you're very busy, Chief," her mother continued.

"Hey, I was a head of the dragon academy, before I was a Chief." Hiccup hopped down. "And I always have time to take a pretty girl for

a ride." He crouched next to Frieda, who now hid shyly behind her mother's skirts. "Toothless is a very gentle dragon and he loves to give rides, don't you, bud?"

Toothless bobbed his head in agreement, then let his tongue hang out and made Frieda smile.

"Riding a dragon is something everyone should get the chance to do." He held out his hand. "Would you like to learn how?"

She nodded, shyly took his hand and followed him over to Toothless.

"The first lesson is trust," he told her as he held out his hand, palm up and kept his eyes on hers. "The dragon has to know he can trust you, and that you can trust him."

Frieda watched as Toothless gently nuzzled Hiccup's hand and her eyes widened.

"Would you like to try?"

She slowly nodded and timidly held out her hand.

"Lower your eyes, that shows him you respect him and aren't challenging him."

She did so and scrunched her shoulders up, as if afraid the dragon might bite her. As Toothless gently touched his nose to her palm, her eyes widened and she looked back at him.

"He...he's warm!"

Hiccup smiled. "Sure he's warm, he's been flying and he has lots of heat floating around inside him that keeps him nice and toasty."

"I thought he...he'd be...um...cold and...slimy."

Toothless lifted his head and snorted in offence, which startled her, so he lowered his head and nudged her hand again, purred.

Frieda glanced at her parents, who smiled encouragingly.

She rubbed his nose hesitantly, watched his eyes close and heard more purrs. "He...he likes this?" she asked Hiccup.

"Oh yeah, he's a big softie. Watch this." Hiccup put his fingers under the Night Fury's chin and scratched that special spot.

Frieda gaped in wonder as the dragon flopped blissfully onto his back. She giggled, hesitantly moved closer and rubbed his belly, watching as one of his legs started to twitch in ecstasy.

"Oh, ho don't get him started on that," Hiccup teased and used a discrete hand signal to bring Toothless back to his feet. "You'll be at it for hours!"

She giggled, excited.

"Are you ready to get on him?" Hiccup asked, and after another look

at her parents, nodded. He lifted her into the saddle, then climbed up behind her; she was so small there was more than enough room for them both. "Up, Bud," he leaned forward to pat Toothless' head. "Gently."

Frieda's eyes grew wider as Toothless hopped up, flapped his wings to gain some altitude, then leisurely glided through the air.

"You doing okay, Frieda?" Hiccup asked, slipping one arm around her waist to hold her in place as she started to slide sideways.

She gulped as she looked down at her disappearing parents and nodded. "W...what if we fall off?"

"We won't."

"What if we do?"

"Then Toothless will catch us."

"How will he know?"

"He knows; he's caught me a dozen times."

"Why'd you fall off so much? Are you clumsy? My friend says I'm clumsy."

Hiccup grinned and felt the vibration of Toothless' laughter. "I'm usually not falling off accidentally. I just let myself fall and he catches me."

She tilted her head back and gaped at him. "\_Why\_ would you do that?"

Toothless snickered and rumbled in agreement and Hiccup sighed. "I'm just weird I guess."

They flew just once around the island, Hiccup didn't perform any tricks or take her too high for her first time. Finally, they landed smoothly back by Freida's parents.

"Did you see me?" she babbled excitedly as her father lifted up to pull her down. "Did you see me flying? Toothless is so nice! He can turn really fast and when his wings flap I can feel the wind and he's so warm and..."

"I'm glad you had a good time, sweetheart," her father said and smiled gratefully at Hiccup. "Maybe we'll get you a dragon of your own when you're a little older, hey?"

"Oh, I want one like Toothless! I want a Night Fury! Did you see the way he likes tummy rubs and..."

"Um...sweetheart," her mother began, gently. "Toothless is the only Night Fury..."

"He can have babies and I can get one and then..."

Hiccup slid off Toothless and approached them, again he crouched beside Freida. "Toothless is a male dragon, so he can't have babies,

Frieda. He's unique to the other dragons because he's the only one we've ever seen."

Her lower lip quivered. "But...I love him."

Hiccup's heart went out to her. "I love him too, because he's so special and unique." He tapped her nose. "But you can still visit with him and even ride on him occasionally, okay?"

She nodded. "Can I...can I hug him?"

"He'd be offended if you didn't." Hiccup walked with her back to Toothless, gave another discrete hand signal and the dragon sat.

Frieda hugged the Night Fury's chest. "I'm sorry you're a unique," she said. "But you're the bestest dragon ever, and if you want to come and play with me you can."

Toothless leaned down, nuzzled her.

She stepped back, then moved to Hiccup, again surprising him by throwing her arms around his waist. "Thank you for letting me ride on your dragon."

"Thank you for being so brave." He whispered in her ear. "You were very brave Frieda. I'm proud of you."

She beamed at him then ran to tell her folks.

He climbed back onto Toothless, and waved as they took off. "Good job, Bud," he said, rubbing Toothless' head. "That was a very good job."

Maybe Chiefing wasn't just speeches, naming babies and running the village. Something like that...He smiled as he urged Toothless higher. Well, something like that he could certainly get used to.

He landed neared the docks to check on the ships that had been destroyed by the storm. He slid off, pulled out a notebook and noted what pieces were salvageable.

"Morning, Chief."

Hiccup grinned and turned to Fishlegs as Meatlug landed beside him. "Hey, Fish. How was your night?"

"It was okay." Fishlegs smiled slyly, and nudged Hiccup. "How was yours?"

"Better than okay." Much, much better, Hiccup thought, outstanding in fact. "How did things go with..." What had been her name? "Helga?"

"Okay. We talked some, you know, about Gronkles, but then she saw this girl she knew and wandered off."

"Sorry to hear that."

"That's okay, I was starting to babble, so I don't blame her. How did



you get Astrid to notice you?"

Hiccup was startled by the question. "I think she got her first real look when she buried her axe in my shield during dragon training and used my head as a brace to pull it out."

Fishlegs chuckled. "No, I mean, how'd you get her to like you?"

"Oh, well." Hiccup considered that for a moment, when things had changed for them. "I'm not sure I actually did anything..."

"You must have done something to make her reconsider her opinion of you, right?"

"Oh...well...That. Well, that was...Um...Huh." He put his finger to his chin and thought about it. "I basically had Toothless kidnap her, forced her to ride on his back, then he scared her half to death by doing some crazy dangerous moves, and then...we uh...flew through some clouds at sunset... Oh, and ah...then we found the Dragon Island."

Fishlegs gaped at him. "I...I'd have to do all of that?"

"Well, minus the...er...kidnapping and scaring part...you could probably...oh and the dragon island thing is kinda useless, but...er...flying. You could take her flying, sure."

"Hail the conquering hero!"

Hiccup smirked as Barf and Belch landed and the twins grinned at him.

"Alright, cough it up, we want details!" Tuffnut insisted hopping off his dragon.

"He wants details," Ruffnut countered and rubbed her head. "I just want the hammer in my brain to stop for two seconds."

"Too much to drink?" Hiccup smirked.

"Too much of everything," she moaned and rested her body atop her dragon's head. "You throw a great party, Hiccup, but man...No more for awhile okay?"

"He's probably not planning to get married again anytime soon."

Hiccup nodded to Snotlout as Hookfang hovered over them. "And the gang's all here."

"Nope, we're missing one." Snotlout sneered at Hiccup. "So, how is the little woman?"

"Why don't you ask her yourself?" Hiccup suggested as he spotted Stormfly headed their way. "Let me know what she says, after you've recovered from your injuries."

Astrid landed, hopped off of Stormfly, and then just stopped when the other riders all spoke together.

"Morning, Mrs. Hiccup."

She glared at them. "Morning peasants," she retorted and broke into a grin.

"She seems to be walking okay," Tuffnut observed and sadly shook his head at Hiccup. "You didn't do it right, man."

Hiccup choked on a mixture of shock, laughter and embarrassment, as Astrid knocked Tuffnut on his ass and put the blade end of her axe at his throat.

"Pardon me?" she inquired through gritted teeth. "What was that?"

The others tried to hide their amusement, not wanting to risk enraging Astrid further, as Hiccup carefully pulled his wife off of his friend.

"Okay, no...no bloodshed the first day after a wedding. I'm pretty sure it would be a bad omen...or something."

Astrid set her axe back into the holster on her saddle. "For your information..." she began, only to have Hiccup put his hand over her mouth.

"No, no information," he assured, quickly. "Nothing to learn here. Let's move on, shall we?"

Astrid grinned and pushed his hand away. "Have you shown him yet?" she asked the others.

"No, we all just got here."

"Shown who what?" Hiccup asked, curious.

"A surprise!" Fishlegs giggled and hopped onto Meatlug. "For you!"

"For me?"

Astrid kissed Hiccup's cheek. "Follow us and you'll see."

Hiccup climbed onto Toothless and did as they requested. They didn't go far, just up from the dock area, and Fishlegs and Astrid flew to the large tarp that was pinned to the side of the cliff.

"What is that?" And why hadn't he noticed it on his flight around the island?

Astrid smiled at Fishlegs and nodded. They pulled the ropes on both sides, and the tarp fell away to reveal an enormous likeness of Stoick the Vast carved into a massive piece of limestone.

Hiccup was speechless as he stared at the face of his father. There were no words to describe how he was feeling; or perhaps there were simply too many to properly voice them. It was an enormous monument to a great man, to his father, and it would be seen from every ship that ventured near Berk.

"We needed a perfect rendering, so I borrowed one of your notebooks," Fishlegs stated, shyly as he and Astrid flew back into formation beside Hiccup. He held the book out. "I hope you're not mad?"

Hiccup looked at him, accepted the book, then turned back to the monument and still he couldn't speak. They had done this for him? His friends had created a kingly tribute to honor his father in complete secrecy; without the council commissioning it or him suggesting it. They just did it, on their own, for him.

Astrid noticed everyone growing more nervous the longer Hiccup remained silent and flew Stormfly close enough that she could lean over and touch her husband's arm. "Babe?"

Her touch seemed to bring him out of his daze, and when he lowered his eyes from his father's image, tears flooded them. He blinked them back, rapidly, cleared his throat and finally met the worried gazes of his friends.

"I..." He cleared his throat again. "This..." He waved a weak hand at the monument and released a hard breath. He couldn't speak. He just couldn't express how much it all meant to him.

"He likes it," Astrid advised softly, understanding his vulnerability. She smiled at all of them. "He really likes it."

Hiccup could only nod and look again upon the face of his father.

"It's not completely finished," Fishlegs advised. "There's some more to do, but we wanted to show you now, for your wedding gift."

"And because it has been a pain in the butt to keep hiding from you."

Hiccup released a watery laugh at Snotlout's comment and wiped at the single tear that escaped. "It's...amazing, guys. Really, It's...Thank you. All of you; thank so much."

"We just want you to know we're here for you, Hiccup," Fishlegs said. "We all loved and honored your father, but you're Chief now, and we feel the same for you. We wanted you to know that."

"Thank you." Hiccup nodded, cleared his throat. "Well...we...we have a lot to do today." And with that, he began to delegate tasks to his team.

\* \* \*

><p><em><strong>If you enjoyed this check out the Sequel When a Man Becomes A Chief already posted on FF<strong>\_

End  
file.